COMBAT AIRCRAFT 122

Marco Mattioli

SAVOIA-MARCHETTI S.79 *SPARVIERO* BOMBER UNITS

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SERIES EDITOR TONY HOLMES

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CHAPTER ONE

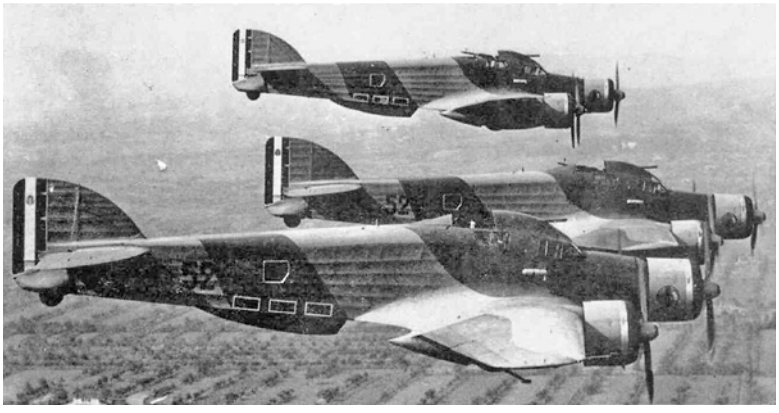
BIRTH OF A BOMBER

The S.79's forebear, I-MAGO, during Generale Valle's East African tour in August 1935. Portly Generale Valle is standing fifth from right, with his back to the camera. In January 1936 the aircraft tasted war for the first time (*Aeronautica Militare (AM)*)

Conceived as a fast eight-passenger airliner in 1933 by Alessandro Marchetti, chief designer of the Società Idrovolanti Alta Italia (SIAI), the iconic S.79 had sufficient performance to make it suitable for employment by the *Regia Aeronautica*. The S.79P (P for passengers) prototype completed its maiden flight on 2 October 1934 at Cameri airfield near Novara, northern Italy, with test pilot Adriano Bacula at the controls. Bearing the registration I-MAGO (in Latin, *imago* means 'image' and *mago* 'wizard' in Italian), the aircraft earned its first laurels during 1935 when it set several world speed records (with different payloads) over increasing distances.

The trimotor soon attracted the interest of the *Regia Aeronautica* and, bearing the military serial MM260, it was chosen to transport *Generale di Squadra Aerea* Giuseppe Valle, Undersecretary and Chief of Staff, to East Africa to organise the invasion of Abyssinia. On 1 August 1935, flown by Tenente Colonnello Attilio Biseo and Capitano Gori Castellani, the aircraft flew from Rome for Massawa, in Eritrea, with an Egyptian stopover at Cairo, in just 12 hours. This performance was repeated on the return flight on 5 August, when the aircraft averaged 230 mph. This remarkable round trip made Generale Valle a strong supporter of the S.79, and he pressed for the development of a bomber variant, designated the S.79M (M for military).

On 3 October 1935 the Second Italo-Abyssinian war commenced, and S.79P I-MAGO soon saw combat for the first time. On 6 January



A three-ship formation of 52ª *Squadriglia* (XXVII *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo*) aircraft in flight over the Italian mainland in the late 1930s (*AM*)

1936, the aircraft, flown by Tenente Colonnello Biseo and Maggiore Angelo Tondi, transported Generale Valle on another East African inspection tour. British authorities delayed I-MAGO's onward journey at Cairo until the evening, and when the flight was resumed both worsening weather and a shortage of fuel forced the pilots to make a safe landing at dusk on a sandy coastal beach. The crew then informed Massawa of their situation by radio, and the base duly supplied the necessary fuel to enable them to reach their destination the following day.

While overflying the frontline in the Ogaden region of eastern Abyssinia on 13 January 1936, I-MAGO was fired upon three times by Abyssinian troops. No damage was inflicted on the transport. Three days later, with Generale Valle's tour completed, the S.79P flew back to Italy in just ten hours. Following its Abyssinian 'baptism of fire', I-MAGO was posted to the Guidonia-based 12° *Stormo Bombardamento* '*Sorci Verdi*' ('Green Mice'), this bomber unit being charged with evaluating the new trimotor. After successfully performing test bombings on the Furbara range north of Rome, I-MAGO served as both the *stormo*'s 'hack' and as a VIP transport.

On 8 July 1936 the S.79M prototype, MM20663, made its first flight with Tenente Colonnello Biseo at the controls, the aircraft subsequently being assigned to 12° *Stormo* exactly three weeks later. During the second half of 1936 and into 1937 the 'Green Mice' received an initial 24 machines (MM20663 to MM20686), which were introduced into service by the *Regia Aeronautica*'s most skilful pilots. The S.79s quickly showed their outstanding speed to the world in a series of record flights, with the aircraft always crewed by 12° *Stormo* personnel. Generale Valle's early relationship with the *Sparviero* (Sparrowhawk) also continued when he unofficially flew the *Regia Aeronautica*'s first operational sortie against Britain's Royal Navy. On 18 August 1937, with Tenente Mancinelli as his co-pilot, Valle undertook a photo-reconnaissance mission over the Mediterranean Fleet's Malta home at an altitude of 6500 ft, returning to Sicily after a flight lasting 1 hr 15 min.

Two days later, on 20/21 August 1937, the *Regia Aeronautica* took part in the international Istres-Damascus-Paris race with five specially modified S.79 *Corsa* (race) machines. Painted red, with green stripes along their fuselages, these specially modified trimotors lacked the type's distinctive dorsal humps but displayed the *Sorci Verdi* badge that was destined to become famous during World War 2. 'Seeing the green mice' (*far vedere i sorci verdi* in Italian) means 'accomplishing outstanding deeds', and the S.79 *Corsa*s featuring three green mice on their fuselages proved worthy of their emblem. Each of the five racers carried a registration derived from their pilots' surnames – I-BIMU (Attilio Biseo and, remarkably, Bruno

Mussolini, *Il Duce*'s third son), I-TOMO (Tondi and Moscatelli), I-CUPI (Cupini and Paradisi, although some sources give this as I-CUPA), I-FILU (Fiori and Lucchini) and I-LICA (Lippi and Castellani). There was also a sixth aircraft, the humped I-ROTR (Rovis and Trimboli).

The S.79s dominated the event, with I-CUPI, I-FILU and I-BIMU taking the first three places, while another two were placed sixth and eighth. Needless to say, such a resounding success was fully exploited by the Fascist propaganda machine, which proudly announced that the S.79 was a mainstay of the *Regia Aeronautica*.

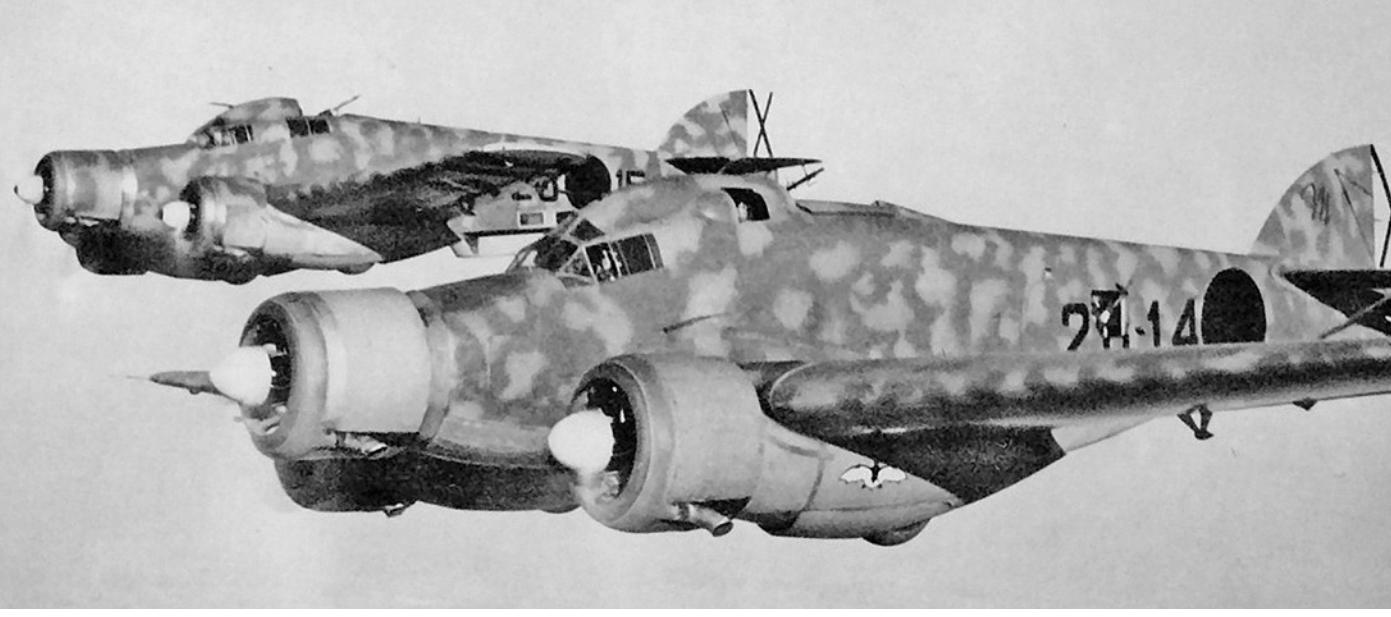
An ex-S.79T of the Rome-to-Rio Atlantic flight at a Brazilian airport, serving with the *Aviacão Militar Brasileira* (Brazilian Military Aviation). Its former codes and serials have been removed, and the aircraft bears the Brazilian national colours on its rudder. Note the North American AT-6 Texan in the foreground and the Focke-Wulf Fw 58 Weihe light transport landing in the background. The latter machines were license-built in Brazil from 1938 (*via author*)

IN BRAZILIAN SERVICE

In the wake of this triumph, on 24 January 1938 three S.79 *Corsa*, converted into T variants (T for transatlantic), flew 6200 miles from Dakar, in Senegal, to the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro at an average speed of 250 mph. Two trimotors, I-BISE, flown by Colonnello Biseo, and I-BRUN, piloted by Tenente Bruno Mussolini, reached Rio on the evening of 25 January. The third, I-MONI, flown by Maggiore Nino Moscatelli, suffered mechanical problems and forced-landed at Natal, in northeastern Brazil. It joined the other two S.79s in Rio the following day. This remarkable flight was again fully exploited by Fascist propaganda (which highlighted the participation of *Il Duce*'s son) and the three S.79s were then presented to the *Aviacao Militar Brasileira* (Brazilian Military Aviation). On 27 April 1938, I-BISE, I-BRUN and I-MONI duly became K-422, K-420 and K-421, respectively. Thenceforth, these trimotors flew in Brazilian colours.

On 9 May 1938 they were assigned to the *Escola de Aviacão Militar* (Military Aviation School), where Maggiore Nino Moscatelli acted as instructor on at least three flights, made on 28 June (serial not reported) and 1 and 8 July 1938 (K-421 and K-420, respectively). On 28 October 1938 K-420 (MM356), flown by pilot Loyola Daher, collided with Stearman K-211, serial number A7603. Apparently, K-420 was later repaired, for it was recorded as flying in September 1941. The aeroplane was struck off *Escola de Aviacão* charge on 12 February 1943.

On 9 July 1939 an unidentified S.79 flow by Major Rubens Canabarro Lucas set a speed record by flying from Porto Alegre to Rio in 2 hr 50 min at an average speed of 263 mph. The last official flight of an S.79 in Brazilian colours was made by K-422, with a pilot by the name of Maldonado at its controls, on 29 June 1943. The Brazilian S.79s' service ended on 25 October 1944 when K-421 (MM358) and K-422 (MM359) were officially grounded by the *Escola de Aeronautica*.



CHAPTER TWO

INTO THE SPANISH ARENA

A striking in-flight photograph of 28-14 and 28-15 from 280ª *Squadriglia*. For the 11 October 1937 raid on Sastago bridge, these two trimotors were flown by Tenente Pucci (with Maggiore Muti on board) and Tenente Colonnello Cupini, respectively. Both aircraft were damaged in combat with *Grupo* 21's I-16 fighters (*AM*)

The Spanish Civil War, which broke out on 18 July 1936, provided an excellent opportunity to test the S.79 in combat, the trimotors being despatched as part of the *Regia Aeronautica*'s *Aviazione Legionaria* (expeditionary corps) that had been hastily formed to provide logistical and tactical support for the pro-fascist Nationalists led by *Generalissimo* Francisco Franco. At dawn on 14 February 1937 1ª *Sezione S.79* (1st S.79 Section) left Guidonia airport, northeast of Rome, and, four hours later, landed at Palma de Mallorca's Son San Juan airfield in the Balearic Islands. 1ª *Sezione* comprised three S.79s (MM20680, MM20685 and MM20686) from 12° *Stormo*'s 205ª *Squadriglia*, flown, respectively, by Capitano Gori Castellani (co-pilot Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi), Tenente Tullio De Prato (co-pilot Sergente Moretti) and Tenente Edvige Pucci (co-pilot Sottotenente Adolfo Rebez). This section flew its first combat sortie three days later, targeting Republican warships in the Gulf of Valencia.

On 13 March at 0850 hrs all three 1ª *Sezione* S.79s – '1' (Maggiore Ettore Muti and Capitano Castellani), '2' (Tenente De Prato and Sottotenente Rebez) and '4' (Tenente Pucci and Sottotenente Pozzi) – bombed Sabadell airfield. Three bombs from S.79 '1' were dropped on a hangar near the port of Barcelona, while the remaining two trimotors expended their ordnance in four runs. Despite a fierce response by anti-aircraft defences, all three aircraft returned to Palma unscathed. Three days later 1ª *Sezione* S.79s '1' (Tenente De Prato), '2' (Capitano Castellani) and '3' (Tenente Pucci)

bombed Barcelona, killing seven and wounding 30 civilians.

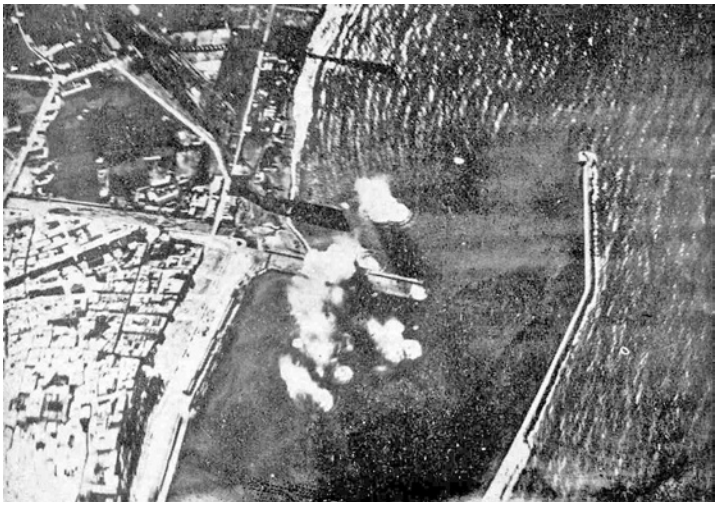
On 20 March the S.79s moved to Sevilla-Tablada on mainland Spain, and three days later the section left Sevilla for Salamanca. 23 March also saw 2ª *Sezione S.79* set off from Italy for Palma. This section's trimotors, individually numbered 1, 2 and 3, were flown by Capitano Giovanni Raina and Tenenti Paolo Moci and Carmelo Giurleo, respectively. However, only the first two S.79s reached their destination at 1430 hrs, for Tenente Giurleo became lost over Sardinia owing to bad weather. On 26 March 1ª *Sezione* left Salamanca for Soria, and the next day two 2ª *Sezione* S.79s, '1' (Capitano Raina and Maggiore Muti) and '2' (Tenente Moci and Sottotenente Enzo Simoni), attacked Celrà airfield near Gerona at 0710 hrs. Because of a defective bomb-bay door, S.79 '1' targeted San Juan railway junction instead as a target of opportunity. On 1 April another nine S.79s, led by Maggiore Mario Aramu, arrived at Palma as a welcome addition to the *Sparvieri* force in Spain, which was now 14 strong.

Some of 1ª *Sezione*'s S.79 crewmen at Palma de Mallorca upon their arrival on 14 February 1937. Note the 'Green Mice' emblem and three black identification stripes on the fuselage. Among the unit's *Avieri*, kneeling in the centre is Airman Ugo Accorsi (*Accorsi*)

Two days later, on 3 April, 2ª *Sezione* left Palma for Sevilla, but it was not an uneventful move. The S.79 crews spotted five steamers near Ibiza, then the bombers were targeted by anti-aircraft fire off Cabo de Gata and, as they prepared to land at Sevilla at 1500 hrs, they were intercepted by a German fighter, whose pilot misidentified them. Luckily, no damage was incurred. The very next day the 2ª *Sezione* war diary reported 'Aircraft camouflaged and new markings. Aircraft numbered 28-11 and 28-12'. In fact, the designation '28' identified the S.79 for the war's duration. Unfortunately, the flying career of 28-12 was brief, for on 7 April it caught fire while being refuelled on Sevilla airfield and was totally destroyed. None of the personnel involved, including pilot Tenente Moci, were hurt. The following day 2ª *Sezione* moved to Soria airfield. Later, the code '28-12' was allotted to another trimotor.

Previously, on 5 April, three 1ª *Sezione* S.79s had been ordered to bomb Celrà airfield again. Tenente Balletta's MM21159 yawed on takeoff at 1230 hrs and was damaged, leaving the remaining two trimotors, 28-1 (Maggiore Mario Aramu) and 28-3 (Tenente Giorgio Mayer) to perform the mission. The target was struck at 1415 hrs by 28-1, but Mayer in 28-3, having failed to find the target, was obliged to release his bomb load into the sea. Ten days later 1ª *Sezione*'s S.79 28-1 (Maggiore Aramu, with Tenente Balletta) bombed the port of Cartagena at 0725 hrs. Aramu's aircraft dropped five 250 kg bombs in two runs, hitting a fort but missing a number of moored naval ships. According to Italian Intelligence, those lucky naval targets were the light cruisers *Libertad* and *Mendez Nuñez*, three large and four small submarines, the tug *Canguro* and the aircraft transport *Dedalo*.

A powerplant in Bilbao was targeted on 22 April, when four S.79s, three from 1ª *Sezione* and Tenente Moci's 28-11 from 2ª *Sezione*, damaged it and



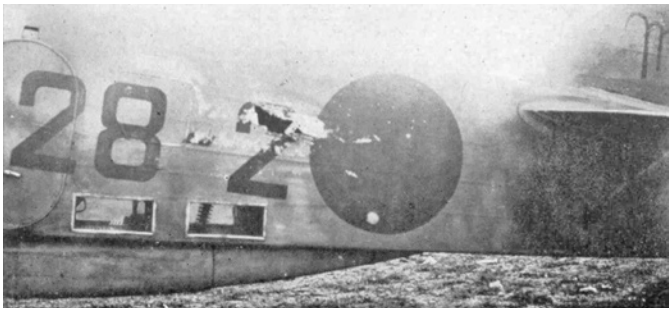
On 21 May 1937 the Republican battleship *Jaime I* was bombed and disabled in Almeria harbour by five 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Maggiore Mario Aramu (*via author*)

then outdistanced eight Republican fighters that tried to intercept them. Three days later, the personnel and aircraft of 1ª and 2ª *Sezione* formed 280ª *Squadriglia*, based at Soria and commanded by Capitano Raina. The next day (26 April), three S.79s from the new unit were involved in the infamous Guernica raid. The operational order issued to 280ª *Squadriglia* states, 'For evident political reasons, the town is not to be bombarded. Tasks and targets – bomb the road and the bridge east of Guernica in order to prevent enemies' retreat'. The S.79s selected for this mission were 28-1 (Capitano Gori Castellani), 28-4 (Tenente Pucci) and 28-11 (Tenente Dagasso), and they took off from Soria at 1530 hrs and arrived over their target at 1630 hrs after approaching from a northerly direction. The S.79s dropped 36 50 kg bombs on the Renteria bridge over the Oca river, but they missed their target and cratered the surrounding terrain instead, thus failing to cut off the Republican troops' retreat.

On 21 May five trimotors of 280ª *Squadriglia*, led by Maggiore Aramu, attacked the Republican battleship *Jaime I* moored at the main quay in Almeria harbour. Not bothered by inaccurate anti-aircraft fire, Aramu's S.79s made two attack runs, dropping about 60 100 kg bombs. On the second run the Italians observed two hits amidships and five near misses, two close to the ship's starboard side and three on the pier. This attack disabled *Jaime I*, which was later towed to Cartagena, where it eventually sank on 17 June following an internal explosion whilst being repaired. Three days later (24 May), S.79s bombed an airfield near Bilbao, and Aramu's bomber was damaged by anti-aircraft fire. That same day 289ª *Squadriglia* arrived at Soria directly from Italy, merging with 280ª *Squadriglia* to form the XXIX *Gruppo Bombardamento Veloce* under the command of 21° *Stormo Bombardamento Pesante*.

On 14 August XXIX *Gruppo* S.79s bombed Republican troops entrenched near Santander, and Aramu's trimotor, 28-2, was again damaged by anti-aircraft fire. Twelve days later, the *Gruppo* moved to Soria airport, and on 29 August its S.79s bombed Republican troops near Belchite. They were in turn attacked by eight I-15 *Chato* biplane fighters of *Grupo* 26, and the Savoias' return fire claimed one of the Republican machines – all the S.79s made it safely back to Soria. The last day of August saw XXIX *Gruppo* S.79s fly two missions over the Belchite Front to strike at Republican troops that were ready to launch a new offensive. Although Tenente Poggi's bomber was hit by ack-ack, he made it back to base.

On 24 May 1937 Maggiore Aramu's S.79 28-2 was damaged by anti-aircraft fire while attacking an airfield near Bilbao (*via author*)



On 20 September four 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s from Soria – 28-15 (Maggiore Aramu), 28-12 (Capitano Giovanni Raina, with Tenente Paolo Moci and Maggiore Ettore Muti on board), 28-16 (Tenente Luigi De Siena) and 28-14 (Tenente Edvige Pucci) bombed the Flix explosives factory near Tarragona. After dropping their bombs, the S.79s were intercepted by nine enemy fighters, although fierce defensive fire allowed the *Sparvieri* to return unscathed. Eight days later, four 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s – 28-15 (Maggiore Aramu), 28-12 (Tenente Colonnello Ranieri Cupini), 28-11 (Tenente Roberto Dagasso) and 28-16 (Tenente Edvige Pucci) – bombed Lérida airfield and were then chased in vain by seven Republican fighters. On 11 October Tenente Colonnello Cupini, in 28-15, led 28-14 (Tenente Edvige Pucci, with Maggiore Ettore Muti on board) to bomb Sastago bridge. They were intercepted by 12 *Grupo* 21 I-16s, a bullet striking the starboard side of 28-15 and 28-14 being holed by 21 machine gun rounds.

On 3 November four 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s took off from Soria at 1410 hrs and attacked Republican troops concentrated at Barbastro, near Lerida. On board Tenente Paolo Moci's 28-14 were two future *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* (Gold Medal for Military Valour) recipients, namely Maggiore Ettore Muti and Sottotenente Adolfo Rebez. All of the S.79s returned to base at 1620 hrs. The hammering of Republican troops at Barbastro was continued the next day by 280ª *Squadriglia* trimotors 28-15 (Tenente Colonnello Cupini, with Tenente Dagasso as bomb aimer), 28-14 (Tenente Paolo Moci, with Maggiore Muti as bomb aimer) and 28-16 (Capitano Giovanni Raina). All of these S.79s engaged in an inconclusive combat with enemy fighters, which pursued the bombers as far as Huesca.

Another significant addition to continental S.79 strength came on 12 November with the arrival from the Balearics of 285ª *Squadriglia*, which was incorporated into XXIX *Gruppo*. The latter unit had left 21° *Stormo* on 15 November, thus achieving autonomous status. Twenty-four hours earlier, on the 14th, XXIX *Gruppo* had moved to Logroño-Recajo airfield, and on the 18th, at 0940 hrs, 280ª and 285ª *Squadriglie* took off on a sortie to attack Republican troops at Bujaraloz, engaging in combat with a solitary enemy fighter over the target. The S.79s of 280ª *Squadriglia* involved in this action were 28-15 (Tenente Colonnello Cupini, with Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi on board) and 28-11 (Tenente Paolo Moci, with Sottotenente Adolfo Rebez on board), both of which returned to base at 1145 hrs. The 285ª *Squadriglia* machines were MM21161/28-10 (flown by unit CO Capitano Aditeo Guidi), MM21170/28-9 (Tenente Giovanni Canepa, with Sottotenente Aldo Buzzanca as co-pilot) and MM21175/28-3 (pilots Sottotenenti Paolo Lauricella and Paolo Spadaccino). All returned to base at 1140 hrs.

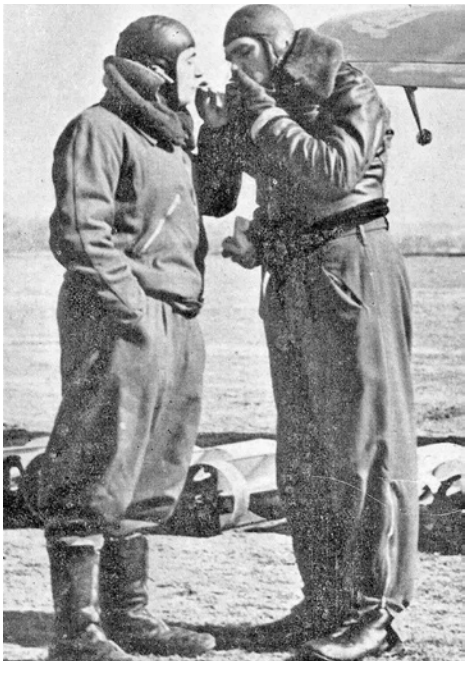
On 23 November three 280ª and three 285ª *Squadriglie* trimotors left Logroño at 1410 hrs to bomb the railway station and factory at Monzòn, near Lérida. The 280ª *Squadriglia* machines were 28-11 (Tenente Colonnello Cupini), 28-15 (Tenente De Siena) and 28-14 (pilots Tenente Moci and Sottotenente Rebez, who reported trouble with the machine's central engine). The S.79s from 285ª *Squadriglia* were MM21165/28-6 (Capitano Guidi), 28-9 (Sottotenente Aldo Buzzanca, with Sottotenente Cozzolino on board) and 28-3 (Sottotenente Gaetano Aliperta). All six S.79s engaged three enemy fighters in combat between Monzón and Huesca, and returned to base at 1610 hrs.

A pair of S.79s fly at altitude over Spanish mountains (*via author*)

Winter had now set in, and on 5 December four 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s (taking off at 0820 hrs) and three from 285ª *Squadriglia* (taking of at 0815 hrs) bombed troop concentrations at Bujaraloz. The 280ª *Squadriglia* trimotors were 28-11 (pilots Tenente Colonnello Cupini and Maggiore Ettore Muti), 28-14 (pilots Tenente Paolo Moci and Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi), 28-16 (Tenente De Siena) and 28-15 (Capitano Roberto Dagasso). The 285ª *Squadriglia* machines were 28-10 (Capitano Guidi), 28-9 (Sottotenente Aldo Buzzanca) and 28-6 (Tenente Giovanni Canepa, with Sottotenente Federico Cozzolino on board). All seven S.79s became engaged with eight enemy fighters, which chased them from Candasnos to Bujaraloz. The bombers all returned to base between 1050 hrs (280ª *Squadriglia*) and 1100 hrs (285ª *Squadriglia*) hours.

Despite persistent poor weather, the new year saw sporadic action for XXIX *Gruppo*. On 20 February six 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s left Logroño at 1135 hrs, and aircraft 28-11, flown by Tenente Colonnello Cupini and Maggiore Ettore Muti (with Capitano Dagasso also on board), bombed Republican troops near Teruel. The remaining five aircraft – 28-18 (pilots Capitano Giovanni Padua and Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi), 28-15 (Sottotenente Adolfo Rebez), 28-16 (Tenente De Siena), 28-12 (Capitano Arduino Buri, a future torpedo-bomber ace) and 28-19 (Tenente Eugenio Miconi) – bombed the Cedrillas road. The five trimotors then engaged 20 *Grupo* 21 I-16 *Rata* fighters in combat, all of the bombers returning to base between 1350 hrs and 1435 hrs.

Tenente Colonnello Ranieri Cupini and Maggiore Ettore Muti flew together on several combat sorties. The latter was awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* for his actions in Spain. Here, they light cigarettes before take-off (*via author*)



The next day, five 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s left Logroño at 1540 hrs to bomb Republican troops near Teruel. These were 28-11 (Tenente Colonnello Cupini, Maggiore Ettore Muti and Capitano Roberto Dagasso), 28-18 (Capitano Giovanni Padua, with Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi as bomb aimer), 28-12 (Capitano Arduino Buri), 28-15 (Sottotenente Adolfo Rebez) and 28-16 (Tenente De Siena). All of them became engaged in a combat with ten I-15 *Chatos* of *Grupo* 26 before returning to base at 1800 hrs.

On 7 March 280ª *Squadriglia* twice attacked the Caspe bridge near Zaragoza in force, leaving Logroño at 1100 hrs and 1615 hrs with three and four S.79s, respectively. On the first sortie, S.79s 28-11 (Tenente Colonnello Cupini, Maggiore Ettore Muti and Capitano Padua), 28-18 (Tenente De Siena) and 28-12 (Capitano Arduino Buri) encountered anti-aircraft fire over Mediana and engaged in combat with two *Grupo* 21 I-16s and two *Grupo* 26 I-15s. One *Chato* was claimed as destroyed. The day's second action saw 28-11 (with the same crew as on the first

sortie), 28-16 (Tenente De Siena) and 28-18 (Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi) airborne. Unfortunately, 28-12 (Capitano Arduino Buri) yawed to the right on takeoff, damaging its starboard wing and undercarriage. This busy day ended with trimotor 28-15 (flown by Capitano Dagasso) reconnoitring over the Alfambra Front between 1700-1800 hrs. This aircraft was carrying a high-ranking observer in the form of *Generale di Divisione Aerea* Mario Bernasconi, Air Officer Commanding (AOC) the *Aviazione Legionaria*.

A trio of 'Green Mice' S.79s from XXIX *Gruppo* fly in close formation over Spain. These trimotors are 28-6, 28-3 and 28-2 (*AM*)

On 26 March, during an action flown from Logroño over the Teruel Front between 1530-1735 hrs by five 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by 28-11 (again flown by Cupini and Muti), aircraft 28-16 (Tenente De Siena) was badly damaged when it was hit by anti-aircraft fire. Although on this occasion the aircraft limped back to Logroño, XXIX *Gruppo* would suffer its first combat losses two days later whilst again flying in support of Nationalist forces fighting on the Teruel Front.

At 1130 hrs and 1150 hrs, respectively, one 280ª and three 285ª *Squadriglie* S.79s took off to bomb Republican anti-aircraft batteries north of La Fresneda. At 1305 hrs the starboard wing of S.79 MM21175/28-3 (pilots Sottotenenti Paolo Spadaccino and Federico Cozzolino) was hit by a large-calibre shell, causing the bomber to collide with lead S.79 28-25 (flown by Capitano Tommaso Parini). Both aircraft subsequently crashed behind enemy lines near Alcañiz. Three aircrew survived the incident, the remaining nine being killed (although five parachutes were observed). Amongst those killed were Capitano Parini and Sottotenente Cozzolino (the latter was executed by Republican militiamen after his capture), both of whom were posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*. The remaining two 285ª *Squadriglia* aircraft returned to Logroño unscathed after bombing independently.

On 9 April 285ª *Squadriglia* was reassigned to the newly-formed XXX *Gruppo*, which also took command of 281ª *Squadriglia* 24 hours later. On 18 April XXIX *Gruppo* ceased to be autonomous when it joined XXX *Gruppo* to form the new 111° *Stormo Bombardamento Veloce 'Sparvieri'*, led by Tenente Colonnello Ranieri Cupini, veteran of Generale Balbo's Atlantic cruises.

Six days earlier, on 12 April, another disaster had struck XXIX *Gruppo*. At 1555 hrs three 289ª *Squadriglia* S.79s – 28-21 (Capitano Arduino Buri), 28-22 (Tenente Otello Rovis) and 28-24 (Tenente Minervino) – and four 280ª *Squadriglia* trimotors – MM21380/28-11 (flown by Tenente Colonnello Cupini and Maggiore Ettore Muti, with Capitano Dagasso as bomb aimer), 28-16 (flown by Capitano Padua and Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi), 28-14 (Sottotenente Adolfo Rebez) and 28-15 (Sottotenente Giovanni Ruggiero, Tenente Giulio Giovine and Sergente Maggiore Ezio Biondi) left Logroño to bomb enemy troops north of Cherta and on Mount Som. At 1655 hrs, as the patrol dropped its fragmentation bombs on target

Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi, a veteran of many sorties over Spain, lost his life on 15 July 1938 when his 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79 28-11 crashed near Valdelinares. He was a posthumous *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* recipient (*AM*)

from 13,000 ft, one of them exploded on board Tenente Rovis' 28-22, causing the aircraft to crash behind enemy lines. All of its crew were killed. 289ª *Squadriglia*'s war diary reported, 'The explosion happened with such formidable intensity that the wingman aircraft [28-24] was hit by splinters. A few seconds after the explosion the aircraft [28-22] spun down. It seems certain that a crewmember bailed out. The aircraft crashed close to Ebro, in the Cherta region'.

This was not the only setback that befell this seemingly doomed mission, as the fragmentation bomb load dropped by 280ª *Squadriglia*'s unlucky 28-16 exploded in mid-air, raining debris down on 28-15 – it was hit by 20 shell splinters. The remaining 280ª and 289ª *Squadriglie* trimotors landed back at Logroño between 1800-1820 hrs.

On 14 May Tenente Colonnello Cupini (the winner of the 1937 Istres-Damascus-Paris air race) handed over command of 111° *Stormo* to Colonnello Aleardo Martire just as the unit became embroiled in an intense period of action that continued through into the early summer. Four days later, ten 111° *Stormo* S.79s, led by Colonnello Martire (on board 28-11 of 280ª *Squadriglia*), took off from Logroño at 0950 hrs to bomb Republican positions northwest of Mosqueruela. Among the bombers was 28-1 of 285ª *Squadriglia*, flown by the ubiquitous Maggiore Ettore Muti. The formation returned to base at 1155 hrs. On 24 May 111° *Stormo* left Logroño for Zaragoza-Valenzuela, where it would remain for many months.

The next (and last) S.79 combat loss suffered by the *Aviazione Legionaria* occurred on 15 July, when five 280ª *Squadriglia Sparvieri* targeted enemy vehicles on the road south of Barracas. On that fateful day the S.79s that left Zaragoza at 1500 hrs were 28-16 (Capitano Dagasso), 28-12 (pilot Sottotenente Rebez, with bomb aimer Sergente Maggiore Ezio Biondi), 28-18 (Capitano Ildebrando Ercolani), 28-14 (Tenente Aramis Ammannato) and 28-11 (pilots Tenente Giulio Giovine and Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi). During the action the rearmost trimotor, 28-11, crashed into a fog-shrouded mountain top near Valdelinares. Five aircrew out of six on board perished, including bomb aimer Sottotenente Umberto Rizzi, Sottotenente Aurelio Pozzi (veteran of at least 218 missions, who was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*), and Tenente Giulio Giovine (who received a *Medaglia d'Argento al Valor Militare* (Silver Medal for Military Valour) posthumously). The sole survivor was Aviere Scelto Attilio Bozzano, who took to his parachute. The remaining four S.79s made it back to base at 1645 hrs.

On 26 July four 280ª *Squadriglia Sparvieri* were unsuccessfully chased near the Port of Tarragona by four *Grupo* 21 *Rata* fighters. Fifteen days later Colonnello Gaeta assumed command of 111° *Stormo*, replacing Colonnello Martire. From August through to October 1938, 111° *Stormo* S.79s bombed the Flix bridge, vital for Republican military traffic, on several occasions. Other targets attacked during this period included Segorbe railway station, the Gandesa road network and enemy troops concentrated in the Sierra de Caballs area.

On 28 October five 280ª *Squadriglia Sparvieri* took off at 0935 hrs to fly a mission that was led by high-ranking *Generale di Squadra Aerea* Francesco Pricolo, who was at the controls of S.79 28-12 (with Colonnello Giuseppe Gaeta as co-pilot). The aircraft duly dropped 50 100 kg bombs

on Republican positions near Tarragona, with 28-18 (Maggiore Guido Spolverato) and 28-14 (Tenente Aramis Ammannato, with co-pilot Sottotenente Giovanni Chiasserini) also participating in the operation. All five S.79s had landed back at Zaragoza by 1115 hrs. Eight days later, *Sparvieri* gunners claimed two *Grupo* 21 *Rata* and two *Grupo* 26 *Chato* fighters shot down in combat.

On 19 December Tenente Colonnello Mario Vetrella took command of 111° *Stormo*, replacing Colonnello Martire. The unit's new commander made his combat debut on Christmas Day, when his S.79s bombed Republican V Corps units between Castelldans and Borjas Blancas. The ten trimotors involved in the mission were intercepted by 20 6ª *Escuadrilla de Moscas* I-16s of *Grupo* 21, and in the ensuing clash the Italian gunners claimed one *Rata* fighter shot down and another probable without loss (other sources reported three *Rata* downed). The only casualty suffered by the S.79 force was caused by anti-aircraft fire, which killed Aviere Antonio Greco.

On 4 January 1939 280ª *Squadriglia* again bombed Borjas Blancas. On this occasion anti-aircraft fire struck S.79 28-16, killing pilot Sottotenente Giovanni Chiasserini and injuring three other crewmen. Co-pilot Sergente Maggiore Ezio Biondi, although badly wounded, managed to nurse the damaged trimotor back to base. Both the dead Chiasserini and the wounded Biondi were decorated with the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*.

Nine days later, 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s 28-11 (Sottotenente Savini), 28-14 (Tenente Aramis Ammannato) and 28-15 (Tenente Francesco Valente), led by Colonnello Mario Vetrella in 28-12, left Zaragoza at 1045 hrs to bomb a road near Lérida. The trimotors encountered both fierce anti-aircraft fire and three *Grupo* 21 I-16s, the latter being repelled by the Italian gunners' defensive fire. All of the trimotors returned to base at 1310 hrs. The very next day, 14 January, five 280ª *Squadriglia* aircraft, led by Maggiore Ettore Muti in 28-12, targeted the same area. The remaining four S.79s were 28-14 (Tenente Aramis Ammannato), 28-19 (Tenente Franco Melley, a future torpedo-bomber leader), 28-11 (Tenente Giorgio Savini) and 28-15 (Tenente Francesco Valente). After taking off from Zaragoza at 1110 hrs, the five trimotors bombed their target despite anti-aircraft fire, before returning to base at 1310 hrs.

The war's end was approaching, but on 20 February 1939 a tragic event occurred when an S.81 trimotor 'hack' flown by *stormo* commander Colonnello Vetrella took off from Zaragoza at 1336 hrs. Vetrella's aircraft, bound for Barcelona, which had been seized by the Nationalists on 26 January, had three other unit commanders as passengers – all of the officers were to attend an important meeting in the Catalonian capital. Shortly after takeoff the S.81 crashed, killing all on board. This accident left 111° *Stormo* without a commander until 2 March, when Colonnello Enrico Pezzi took over. Under his leadership the *stormo* flew its final operational flights through to war's end on 1 April, the unit officially ceasing all operations on 21 May. During the Spanish Civil War 111° *Stormo* had flown 426 missions, claiming 19 enemy fighters shot down in 73 aerial combats for the loss of just four S.79s in action. In addition, according to some published sources, the *stormo*'s *Sparvieri* dropped more than 5905 tons of bombs, crediting it with the largest quantity of ordnance expended by any Nationalist unit in-theatre.

BALEARICS HAWKS IN ACTION

S.79s were also heavily involved in the targeting of Republican vessels throughout the campaign in Spain, the *Regia Aeronautica* creating the *Aviazione delle Baleari* to perform this mission. XII *Gruppo 'Sorci Verdi'* was the principal 'instrument' used against Republican shipping and associated port facilities. Owing to international agreements, attacks on ships were allowed only in territorial waters, so the Italian authorities decided to target shipping moored in Republican ports along Spain's Levant coasts. Accordingly, on 27 September 1937, Colonnello Biseo was sent to Son San Juan with 12 12° *Stormo* S.79s to form XII *Gruppo 'Sorci Verdi'*, the bombers initially being based at Mallorca and then at Valenzuela (Zaragoza). Biseo's bombers mainly attacked the ports of Cartagena and Valencia.

Among the XII *Gruppo* pilots was Tenente Bruno Mussolini (*Il Duce*'s third son, as noted in the previous chapter), an Abyssinian War veteran and S.79 racing pilot. Mussolini made his Spanish war debut on 30 September, when Colonnello Biseo, on board S.79 205-1, led ten bombers to attack the port of Alicante. At 0935 hrs and 0945 hrs, respectively, the pilots of trimotors 204-6 and 204-2 aborted their missions owing to mechanical failures. This left just eight S.79s to reach the target, upon which they dropped 20 250 kg bombs and more than 30 100 kg bombs at 1057 hrs. Spanish sources reported 40 bombs striking the port and the beaches at Postiguet, Albufereta and San Juan. In fact, the S.79s had missed their objective, officially due to two malfunctioning hooks on board Biseo's trimotor – Italian bomber pilots usually released their bomb loads after the patrol leaders had dropped first. But Biseo wrote in his private diary that he, wondering how many people would be killed, deliberately missed the target, releasing his ordnance mostly into the sea. Alicante's population suffered just six wounded as a result.

However, the next day was another story. Biseo (who always flew 205-1) was to lead ten XII *Gruppo* S.79s against Barcelona's port area. At 1450 hrs trimotor 204-3, flown by Capitano Giovanni Padua, yawed on takeoff owing to a collapsing undercarriage and was badly damaged. The remaining nine aircraft, including Mussolini's, bombed the target at 1550 hrs, killing 55 civilians and wounding 87. The trimotors were then unsuccessfully pursued by five Republican fighters, the bombers returning to base unscathed.

Tenente Bruno Mussolini and Colonnello Attilio Biseo plan a mission. The former served under Colonnello Biseo's command in XII *Gruppo 'Sorci Verdi'*, flying several sorties over Spain in September and October 1937 (*via author*)

On 2 October eight S.79s of XII *Gruppo* (again led by Biseo's 205-1, and including Bruno Mussolini) struck Denia at 1530 hrs, dropping 16 250 kg bombs on the harbour. The following day ten XII *Gruppo* S.79s (one of which was flown by Tenente Mussolini, and with Biseo in 205-1 as lead aircraft) effectively bombed the port of Valencia at 1020 hrs despite intense anti-aircraft fire. Fifty civilians were killed and 78 wounded. Five minutes later, three of *Grupo* 21's I-16 fighters, led by Soviet pilot Shimelkov, intercepted the bombers, whose defensive fire drove the attackers away.

Exasperated by the continuous Italian raids, the Republicans mounted an air attack on

the S.79s' base at Son San Juan on 7 October. Fifteen Tupolev SB-2 fast bombers from *Grupo* 24 struck at 1000 hrs, although the attack killed just three civilians and set some fuel drums on fire. This raid did not prevent five S.79s of XII *Gruppo* taking off at 1210 hrs to bomb the port of Sagunto, the mission being led by Maggiore Angelo Tondi. At 1310 hrs their bombs struck the quay and the harbour's railway station. That same afternoon 12 SB-2s of *Grupo* 24's 1ª *Escuadrilla* (led by Soviet pilot Sergej Cernikh) attacked Son San Juan again, and on this occasion all of their bombs missed. Five Fiat CR.32 fighters of X *Gruppo Caccia*, led by Sottotenente Mario Pecile, took off at 1520 hrs and intercepted the bombers as they headed home. In the ensuing aerial battle Sergenti Leonardo Ferrulli (a future World War 2 ace) and Rino Borromeo claimed, respectively, two and one SB-2 shot down in flames. The Republicans confirmed the loss of one SB-2, but the bombers' gunners in turn claimed two CR.32s downed. Some Spanish and Soviet sources make no mention of SB-2 losses in this action.

During one of these raids XII *Gruppo* CO Colonnello Biseo was violently hurled to the ground by a bomb shockwave, dislocating his left shoulder in the process. Despite being severely contused, the next day Biseo, again in 205-1, led four S.79s (including one flown by Tenente Mussolini) to attack the port of Alicante – each bomber was loaded with 16 250 kg bombs apiece. One trimotor aborted owing to a technical fault but the others duly bombed at 1032 hrs, hitting a quay and causing one death and 12 wounded. At 1035 hrs five *Grupo* 26 I-15s intercepted the S.79s, which soon outdistanced them. The second action on 8 October was flown at 1250 hrs by five S.79s led by Maggiore Angelo Tondi, the aircraft bombing Reus airfield at 1400 hrs. Half of the ordnance hit the target, and some Republican fighters scrambled in a vain attempt to intercept the attackers.

The following day Tondi led eight XII *Gruppo* S.79s (four each from 204ª and 205ª *Squadriglie*) over the ports of Rosas and La Selva once again. At 1340 hrs S.79 204-5 left the formation with a technical failure, although the remaining seven trimotors bombed targets despite accurate anti-aircraft fire, hitting the two ports' quays and the small village of Rosas. After bombing La Selva, the formation turned for home at 1405 hrs, being re-joined by 204-5, which had bombed singly in the meantime.

On 20 October Colonnello Biseo, in 205-1, led nine XII *Gruppo* S.79s aloft, five of the aircraft bombing Peñiscola harbour at 1300 hrs and the remaining four attacking the port of Benicarlò. The Peñiscola raid was the last flown by Tenente Bruno Mussolini in Spain, as both *Generalissimo* Franco and *Il Duce* were worried he could be captured by the Republicans.

Two days later XII *Gruppo* S.79s flew two sorties, bombing ships in the port of Tarragona. The first raid took place at 1145 hrs (led by Biseo), followed by a second attack at 1520 hrs when three 204ª *Squadriglia* trimotors bombed Tarragona quay and a steamer that was moored there. While they were dropping their ordnance the S.79s were intercepted by four *Grupo* 21 I-16s, the bombers also coming under anti-aircraft fire from three motorboats. The Italian gunners stoutly defended the trimotors, claiming one *Rata* stricken by a burst of fire. The remaining three I-16s were quickly outdistanced by the retreating S.79s, and they gave up the chase at 1532 hrs.

The remarkable Colonnello Attilio Biseo was one of the leading *Regia Aeronautica* pilots of his time, testing the S.79 in its early stages. An Atlantic flyer with Generale Balbo, he flew S.79 I-MAGO throughout Generale Valle's African tours, then gained third place in the international Istres-Damascus-Paris race. As the CO of 12° *Stormo*, Biseo led the 'Green Mice' XII *Gruppo* during the Spanish Civil War and 33° *Stormo* in North Africa in 1940 (*AM*)

Tenente Bruno Mussolini proved to be a skilful S.79 racing and combat pilot. Already an Abyssinian war veteran, he flew several sorties over Spain with XII *Gruppo 'Sorci Verdi'* during September and October 1937 (*via author*)

On 25 October three 205ª *Squadriglia* S.79s took off at 0925 hrs to bomb the bridge at Rindecanes, but ten minutes into the mission 205-4 left the formation due to an undercarriage failure. The pilot duly returned to base at 0955 hrs after releasing his ordnance into the sea. After bombing the bridge at 1040 hrs, the S.79s were chased by an I-16 of *Grupo* 21 for five minutes.

On 11 November Colonnello Biseo handed temporary command of XII *Gruppo* over to Maggiore Umberto Fiore while he led 12° *Stormo* personnel back to Italy two days later. The *stormo*'s 12 S.79s remained in-theatre assigned to XII *Gruppo*, 12° *Stormo* having to wait until the new year to be re-equipped with brand new *Sparvieri*.

In an attempt to hasten the war's end, the Italians decided to strengthen the *Aviazione delle Baleari* bomber force towards the end of November 1937. At 1100 hrs on the very last day of that month, 12 XXVIII *Gruppo* (8° *Stormo*) S.79s (six each from 10ª and 19ª *Squadriglie*) took off from Guidonia-Montecelio and headed for Palma de Mallorca, where they landed at 1330 hrs. After taking several days to organise both crews and aircraft, XXVIII *Gruppo* despatched its first mission on 3 December when bombers targeted the blast furnaces in Sagunto. However, because of malfunctioning bomb-bay doors, aircrew struggled to drop their ordnance, and all of the aircraft returned to base with damaged S.79s. Trimotor 'Black 3' of 10ª *Squadriglia* (the unit's aircraft had black fuselage codes) flown by Sottotenente Pepe lost one door completely.

After suffering an inconclusive air raid by SB-2 bombers of *Grupo* 24 on 7 December, and having mounted further missions, XXVIII *Gruppo* despatched six S.79s (three each from 10ª and 19ª *Squadriglie*, aircraft from the latter unit having red fuselage codes) on 24 December to attack Sagunto. The 10ª *Squadriglia* section, comprising 'Black 1' (section leader, flown by Capitano Tullio De Prato), 'Black 2' (Sottotenente Notari) and 'Black 6' (Tenente Piacentini), achieved an accurate strike on enemy transports travelling on the road from Sagunto to Teruel. During the course of the mission an I-16 fighter from *Grupo* 21 bounced the 19ª *Squadriglia* section led by Capitano Zigiotti, firing three bursts at S.79 'Red 3' flown by Sottotenente Eugenio Geymet and scoring 20 hits on the bomber's wings and tailplane. The crew escaped injury, however.

Two S.79s of 10ª *Squadriglia* (XXVIII *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo*) overfly the port of Tarragona. In the foreground is trimotor 'Black 1', usually flown by the unit's commander, Capitano Tullio De Prato (*AM*)

GENERALE VALLE STRIKES AGAIN

New Year's Day 1938 saw another of Generale Valle's exploits, with his personal intervention in the Spanish conflict. Anxious to clear any remaining doubts about the S.79's performance as a long-range fast bomber, Valle, without *Il Duce*'s authorisation, and with Maggiore Angelo Tondi as his co-pilot, took off from Guidonia-Montecelio airport at 1645 hrs in a *Sparviero* laden with eight 100 kg bombs. Their intended target was Barcelona, which they reached after a long overwater flight. Using the muzzle flashes

of the harbour's anti-aircraft defences to pinpoint objectives, Valle and Tondi dropped their bomb load and then swiftly returned home, landing back at Guidonia-Montecelio at 2245 hrs. By successfully completing this hazardous mission, Valle and Tondi conclusively demonstrated the S.79's capabilities. This daring flight certainly stirred up a reaction, with Italian Foreign Affairs Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano – Mussolini's son-in-law and an aviator himself – noting in his diary, 'Yesterday Valle, starting from Monte Celio, bombed Barcelona. Flight's duration, six hours. Why wasn't I told by him? He promised to take me the next time'.

On 12 January at 1445 hrs the *Aviazione delle Baleari*'s S.79 force was reinforced by the arrival of 8° *Stormo*'s XXVII *Gruppo*, led by Colonnello Rossanigo, which flew in directly from Italy. This *gruppo* was comprised of 18ª and 52ª *Squadriglie*. With its two *gruppi* reunited again, 8° *Stormo* '*Falchi delle Baleari*' (Balearic Hawks) was the only *Regia Aeronautica* unit to operate at full strength in Spain. Three days later, the new *Aviazione delle Baleari* AOC, Generale Vincenzo Velardi, arrived at Mallorca to meet his subordinates.

On 16 January three 18ª *Squadriglia* S.79s – 'White 1' (pilots Maggiore Gennaro Lamanna and Sottotenente Bartolomeo Tomasino), 'White 3' (Sottotenente Dante Magagnoli, a future torpedo-bomber ace) and 'White 4' (Sottotenente Ferrari) – hit the Sagunto blast furnaces in the face of fierce anti-aircraft fire. Four days later, three 10ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, 'Black 1' (Maggiore Di Carlo), 'Black 4' (Capitano De Prato) and 'Black 5' (Sottotenente Galassi) bombed the port of Tarragona with 12 250 kg and three 20 kg incendiary bombs, claiming a ship hit. During their return flight the S.79s intercepted a civilian trimotor identified as French and reportedly coded F-ANT, the unit's war diary later commenting, 'What a pity! We had the opportunity to behave as fighters and to use the forward gun, but we had to give up'.

That same day 18ª *Squadriglia*'s 'White 2' (Maggiore Lamanna), 'White 3' (Sottotenente Magagnoli) and 'White 4' (Sottotenente Stefani) bombed Valencia, whose defending fighters got airborne too late to intercept the S.79s. On 27 January 18ª *Squadriglia*'s 'Black 4' (Tenente Piacentini), 'Black 2' (Sottotenente Galassi) and 'Black 6' (Sottotenente Mazzarino) of XXVIII *Gruppo*, accompanied by a 19ª *Squadriglia* patrol, attacked Sagunto, the S.79s' bombs hitting the French freighter *Prado*.

After several actions had been flown against targets in the Levante region of the Iberian Peninsula between 3 and 8 February, and in the wake of international condemnation of the violent bombardment of Barcelona during January, Italian air activity was intermittently suspended on several occasions during much of February and early March. Resuming their actions on 6 March to avenge the loss of the Nationalist heavy cruiser *Baleares*, which had been sunk with terrible loss of life in the Battle of Cabo de Palos during the early hours of that same day, both of 8° *Stormo*'s S.79 *gruppi* (Colonnello Rossanigo in 'Black 4' leading XXVIII *Gruppo*) claimed hits on the Republican cruiser *Libertad* and the destroyer *Lepanto* moored in Cartagena harbour. These alleged successes were not confirmed by the Republicans, however.

An important sortie was flown nine days later by a mixed five-strong patrol by 10ª (three S.79s) and 19ª *Squadriglie* (two S.79s). On board 10ª *Squadriglia*'s 'Black 5' was *Aviazione delle Baleari* AOC Generale Vincenzo Velardi, along with Maggiore Di Carlo and Capitano De Prato. Colonnello Rossanigo also participated in this action on board a 19ª *Squadriglia* aircraft.

Regia Aeronautica Chief of Staff *Generale di Squadra Aerea* Giuseppe Valle tested the S.79's capabilities on many occasions, flying over Malta on August 1937 and bombing Barcelona at night on 1 January 1938 to clear any doubt about the new trimotor's capabilities (*AM*)

On 16 March, Italian bombers raided Barcelona once again, these missions serving both as a display of might to the Nationalist's German allies and as a warning to the enemy. Confirming the resumption of the campaign against Spain's second-largest city, the *Regia Aeronautica*'s Chief of Staff, Generale Valle, forwarded a telegram to Generale Velardi that read, 'Starting from tonight, a violent action will be launched over Barcelona. This sealed the city's fate. Accordingly, and dramatically, between 2215 hrs on 16 March and 1510 hrs on the 18th, Italian S.81 and S.79 bombers flew 13 raids against Barcelona, raining at least 44 tons of ordnance down on the Catalonian city.

The most destructive raid was the one flown by five XXVII *Gruppo* S.79s (two from 18ª and three from 52ª *Squadriglie*) at around 1400 hrs on 17 March. One bomb struck a large lorry heading along Cortes Catalanas Avenue that was carrying 23 soldiers and possibly as much as eight tons of explosives. The truck blew up at the crossroads with Carrer de Balmes, killing everyone on board and devastating the surrounding area. The resulting smoke column from the explosion, which rose to a height of 800 ft and was 300 ft wide, shocked the Italian aircrew. Thenceforth, and for years afterwards, not only the international press but also some post-war historians thought (and wrote) that the Italians had tested a new experimental 'super-bomb'. At the time the human cost of these air raids was reported to be 872 (or 875) killed, including 118 children, but today's historians set the tally at around 1000, including those who were mortally wounded and subsequently died.

On 25 April five 10ª and three 19ª *Squadriglie* S.79s left Mallorca to attack both the port of Valencia and a nearby railway line. From 20,300 ft they dropped 64 100 kg mines and 32 15 kg incendiary bombs. The 10ª *Squadriglia* war diary later recorded;

'The aim was perfect – a communist cipher intercepted in the evening confirmed it. We have sunk three motor yachts and badly damaged two ships loaded with food, one English and one French. Anti-aircraft reaction was really intense, bursts coming really close to the formation at same height. We banked to starboard, putting ourselves on the return route.'

All of the S.79s landed back at 1730 hrs. Their actions that day badly damaged the British freighters *Stanland* and *Celtic Star*, and two other steamers – one of them probably the *Isadora* – were also damaged. According to some sources bombs also hit the British destroyer HMS *Gallant*.

At Barcelona at 1400 hrs on 17 March 1938, an explosive-laden military lorry was hit by a bomb dropped by a XXVII *Gruppo* S.79. The massive explosion which followed, seen in this photograph, devastated the surrounding area (*AM*)

On the last day of April Colonnello Rossanigo and Capitano de Prato in S.79 'Black 1' led five 10ª and three 19ª *Squadriglie* trimotors to attack Barcelona's port. The formation took off at 0700 hrs, although one 19ª *Squadriglia* aircraft did not start, leaving seven XXVIII *Gruppo* S.79s to continue. The bombers struck the central quay and some ships

– according to naval reports two British steamers were damaged and the Spanish freighters *Casa Cross* and *Sac 7* sunk.

On 5 May at 1315 hrs, six XXVIII *Gruppo* S.79s took off in two three-aircraft patrols, the spearhead formation being led by 19ª *Squadriglia*'s Capitano Zigiotti and the second, from 10ª *Squadriglia*, having Capitani De Prato leading in 'Black 1', with Tenente Piacentini ('Black 4') and Sottotenente Galassi ('Black 5') as wingmen. Their intended target was the port of Valencia, and the 10ª *Squadriglia* war diary recorded;

'The aim, hampered by wind, falls a bit short. We bank to starboard on to the return route. Some biplanes [I-15s] are spotted chasing us. We increase our speed, maintaining altitude, wingmen in close contact with the patrol leader. The enemies pursue us for nearly two-thirds of the way, but they do not catch us. Given such an impossibility, they turn away.'

The intelligence report for that Valencia raid reports a harbour dredger sunk and damage inflicted on the freighters *Carmen* (Spanish), *Stanworld* (British) and the French tanker *El Djem*. Two days later, XXVIII *Gruppo* targeted Valencia again, sending five 10ª and three 19ª *Squadriglie* S.79s. The formation leader was 10ª *Squadriglia*'s Capitano De Prato in S.79 'Black 1', while the 19ª *Squadriglia* section leader was Tenente Faralli. The 10ª *Squadriglia* war diary reported;

'The results are amazing. We have dropped on the harbour, the target being hit. We can clearly see bombs exploding on quays and ships, with an explosion on a big steamer also being seen.'

Nationalist Intelligence reported that the British freighters *Greatend* and *Stanworld* were damaged, along with a Spanish tanker.

On 20 May XXVIII *Gruppo* S.79s took off at 1440 hrs to attack Valencia for a third time, and at 1535 hrs they dropped 24 100 kg and 12 15 kg bombs. Avoiding the insignificant anti-aircraft fire, the Italians landed back at Palma at 1650 hrs. Intercepted Republican radio communications reported hits on four Spanish vessels, with the 2545-ton military transport *Almirante Lobo* being damaged, the tanker *Campomanes* partly set alight and the fishing vessels *Maria Adela* sunk and *Josefa* damaged. Eight days later, after taking off at 0820 hrs, 10ª and 19ª *Squadriglie* S.79s targeted Barcelona's port area, inflicting slight damage on the Republican destroyer *Almirante Valdes* and hit several steamers. That same day XXVII *Gruppo* sent four S.79s from 52ª *Squadriglia* to attack Valencia, the aircraft being flown by Maggiore Lamanna, Capitano Michele Banchio, Tenente Lussatto and Sottotenente Magagnoli. Bombs badly damaged the 1495-ton British freighter *Greatend*.

On 30 May S.79s from 10ª *Squadriglia* took off at 0840 hrs and bombed Barcelona at 0950 hrs, hitting the harbour entrance and

Republican fighters, probably Dewoitine 372s, attack S.79s whilst returning to base after a bombing raid on Barcelona (*AM*)

moored ships. The 2575-ton French tanker *El Djem* was hit again, leaving it a total loss. In addition, two Spanish vessels, the motor yachts *Cabañal* and *San Martin de Gijon*, were both slightly damaged and set afire. The next day S.79s sank the 3995-ton British freighter *Penthames* in Valencia harbour, this vessel having been previously hit on 23 May.

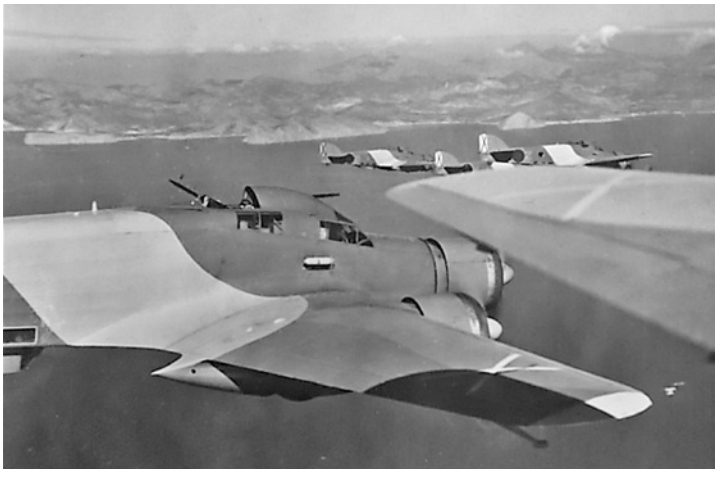
At 0950 hrs on 6 June, five 10ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, led by Capitano De Prato in 'Black 1', and four from 19ª *Squadriglia* bombed Valencia and then engaged in combat with three Republican fighters, the Italian gunners claiming one of them shot down. That same day three 52ª *Squadriglia* trimotors, led by Capitano Michele Banchio, targeted Alicante, where the 5387-ton British oiler *English Tanker* was sunk and the 5683-ton British freighter *St Winifred* left badly damaged. This raid also killed 40 people and wounded more than 100, some of whom were crewmen of the British steamers *St Winifred* and *Maryad*. Four days later, three 10ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, including Tenente Romanese's 'Black 4', and three each from 19ª and 52ª *Squadriglie* bombed the port of Alicante at 1635 hrs, wrecking the 3683-ton British freighter *Thorpeheaven*.

On 15 June five 10ª *Squadriglia* trimotors led by Capitano De Prato's 'Black 1' attacked Valencia between 1000 hrs and 1230 hrs, while Tenente Romanese's 'Black 4' bombed singly between 1535 hrs and 1750 hrs. The same target was attacked later that day by two four-strong 52ª *Squadriglia* patrols, one being led by Capitano Banchio. The Italian bombers hit three French merchantmen, the 500-ton *Gaulois* (damaged), the 212-ton *Cap Bear* (set aflame and lost) and the *Genevenois* (badly damaged). Other victims were the 800-ton Spanish gunboat *Laya* (sunk), the motor yachts *Cala Virgili* and *Mendo* (both set alight) and the *Francesca Casanova* (damaged).

Four days later four 52ª *Squadriglia* S.79s bombed the port of Valencia, after which they were engaged in combat by three I-15s from *Grupo* 26. The Italian gunners claimed one victory, while bombs damaged the British freighter *Thurston*. At 0530 hrs on 21 June three 19ª and five 10ª *Squadriglie* S.79s bombed Valencia, sinking the 4798-ton British freighter *Thorpeness*. Twenty-four hours later, five 10ª *Squadriglia* S.79s returned to the port and sank the 3054-ton British freighter *Sunion*.

Hammering of ships in Valencia harbour continued on 27 June, when five 10ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Maggiore Lamanna set three freighters alight. These were the British-registered 4903-ton *Arlon* and *Durham* and the Spanish *Guecho*. That same day four 52ª *Squadriglia* trimotors bombed Valencia as well, although they were intercepted by three *Grupo* 26 I-15s that scored 18 hits on one of the S.79s. Alicante port was also targeted on the 27th when five trimotors from 10ª *Squadriglia* attacked at 0630 hrs, sinking the 4793-ton British freighter *Farnham*, setting another merchant ship alight and damaging three more vessels. Other vessels hit in Valencia harbour during June included the freighters *Gandia*, *Goxinia*, *Lucky* (already wrecked on 10 February), *Marconi*, *Shapharer*, *Stanleigh* and *Stanray*.

On 4 July, during yet another raid on Valencia, I-16 fighters of 3ª *Escuadrilla de Moscas*, led by ace Sargento Francisco Tarazona, intercepted S.79s and claimed two of the bombers shot down (though none were lost). Despite their best efforts, the Republican fighter pilots failed to prevent the trimotors from bombing the city. Eleven days later, Colonnello Gennaro Giordano took over command of 8° *Stormo* from Colonnello Ernesto Rossanigo,



A formation of XXVII *Gruppo* (8° *Stormo*) trimotors head target-bound along Spain's Balearic Sea coastline (*AM*)

although the latter continued to fly operationally until his repatriation on 21 July. On 19 July two S.79s bombed Valencia again, setting the British steamer *Stanland* afire and damaging two more freighters.

The Balearic Hawks continued to batter Republican targets in the Levante well into the late summer. On 6 September, for example, the British steamer *Marvia* was set alight and damaged in Alicante harbour by S.79s from 8° *Stormo*. Three days later, three 10ª and two 19ª *Squadriglie* aircraft bombed Valencia, inflicting further damage on the British freighter *Stanford* (previously hit at Cartagena by 10ª *Squadriglia* on 9 January) and also striking the Spanish ships *Remedios* and *Mari Asuncion*. Between 16 September and 13 October S.79 crews claimed to have bombed 16 steamers in the harbour at Barcelona. In particular, on 4 October, three 52ª *Squadriglia* aircraft, led by Tenente Colonnello Riccardo Hellmuth Seidl (Neapolitan-born and of Bavarian ancestry), targeted the British steamers *Gothic* and *Thorpebay*, damaging both of them.

Nine days later, on 13 October, three 52ª *Squadriglia* trimotors, again led by Tenente Colonnello Seidl, wrecked the 1370-ton British steamer *Yorkbrook*. Attacked by three *Grupo* 21 I-16 *Rata* fighters overhead Barcelona, all three S.79s were holed in the ensuing combat. Seidl's bomber was hit eight times, Tenente Putti's three times and Sottotenente Todaro's once. None of the aircrew were wounded, however.

On 6 December the Republican ace Sargento Francisco Tarazona of 3ª *Escuadrilla de Moscas* ran out of ammunition while attempting to shoot down an S.79 over Barcelona, thus testifying to the legendary robustness of the *Sparviero*. The next day, four 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79s and one from 10ª *Squadriglia* bombed Alicante port, slightly damaging the British steamer *Lake Geneva*. On 14 December five 8° *Stormo* S.79s, including two from 52ª *Squadriglia*, targeted Valencia, and despite strong anti-aircraft fire they damaged the British coaler *Stanholme*, hit the Spanish steamers *Remedios* and *Campomanes* and sank a floating crane.

On Christmas Day 1938 I-16s of 6ª *Escuadrilla de Moscas* intercepted ten S.79s, whose gunners claimed one *Rata* shot down and a second as a probable. Two days later four S.79s from 19ª *Squadriglia*, two from 52ª *Squadriglia* (one flown by Tenente Putti) and one from 10ª *Squadriglia* ('Black 5', flown by Sottotenente Mazzotti and Maresciallo Troiano) took off at 0805 hrs to bomb Barcelona, where they sank the 1407-ton British steamer *Stancroft*. The S.79s were then intercepted by six enemy fighters, which scored hits on two 19ª *Squadriglia* aircraft and the solitary 10ª *Squadriglia* machine. Nevertheless, all the trimotors returned to base at 1030 hrs.

The last day of 1938 saw another fierce aerial combat take place over Barcelona when five 8° *Stormo* S.79s bombed the city's thermoelectric plant

Bombs dropped by 8° *Stormo* S.79s led by Tenente Colonnello Gostoli fall on the port of Valencia on 8 November 1938 (*AM*)

and a weapons factory – the trimotors also hit an anti-aircraft battery and a pier in the harbour. Five I-16s of *Grupo* 21 scrambled to intercept the bombers and three S.79s returned to base badly holed. Tenente Funghi of 10ª *Squadriglia* was slightly wounded and Italian gunners claimed a *Rata* shot down (unconfirmed).

On 1 January five 52ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Quattrociocchi bombed Cartagena, two I-16s of *Grupo* 21 chasing them unsuccessfully. Fifteen days later Tenente Colonnello Seidl and Tenente Putti of 52ª *Squadriglia*, flying S.79s 'Blue 6' and 'Blue 5', fought off six enemy fighters over Barcelona, claiming one of them shot down. The Republican fighters, probably from 3ª *Escuadrilla de Moscas* based at Reus airfield, scored four hits on 'Blue 6' and five on 'Blue 5'.

On 22 January XXVIII *Gruppo*, led by unit CO Tenente Colonnello Corti, targeted Barcelona harbour yet again, sinking two steamers (including the 6581-ton *African Mariner*) and damaging a third. Two days later, two 52ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, led by Capitano Quattrociocchi, along with 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, also attacked Barcelona. Anti-aircraft fire hit two 19ª *Squadriglia* aircraft, but no before the bombers had all but sunk the 2153-ton British freighter *Miocene*. On 26 January two 52ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, piloted by Capitano Quattrociocchi and Tenente Putti, bombed the port of La Selva, encountering heavy anti-aircraft fire. According to some published sources, the 177-ton French steamer *Azelma* was lost to aerial attack at Sant Felix de Guixols that same day.

26 January also saw Barcelona fall to the Nationalists, and air operations continued to harass retreating Republican forces, whose defeat was imminent. On 1 February ten 8° *Stormo* S.79s bombed Cartagena, engaging six enemy fighters during the course of the mission and claiming two *Rata* shot down. That same day 52ª *Squadriglia* reported two trimotors (one flown by Tenente Putti) hit by anti-aircraft shell splinters, while Capitano Quattrociocchi's bomber was holed by machine gun rounds. The Republicans reported that six I-15s of 2ª *Escuadrilla* (*Grupo* 26) were scrambled, but suffered no losses.

On 6 February 8° *Stormo* despatched three five-aircraft S.79 patrols over the ports of Rosas, La Selva and Alicante. At Alicante, Italian crews reported inflicting slight damage on the French steamer *Authorpe*. At 1115 hrs the following day, ten 8° *Stormo* S.79s bombed Cartagena, claiming four warships hit. The aircraft were then intercepted by four I-15s from *Grupo* 26 and two I-16s from *Grupo* 21, with Italian gunners claiming two *Chato* fighters shot down. On 9 February Cartagena endured

another attack by 8° *Stormo*, the S.79s claiming a destroyer hit and a I-15 from *Grupo* 26 shot down.

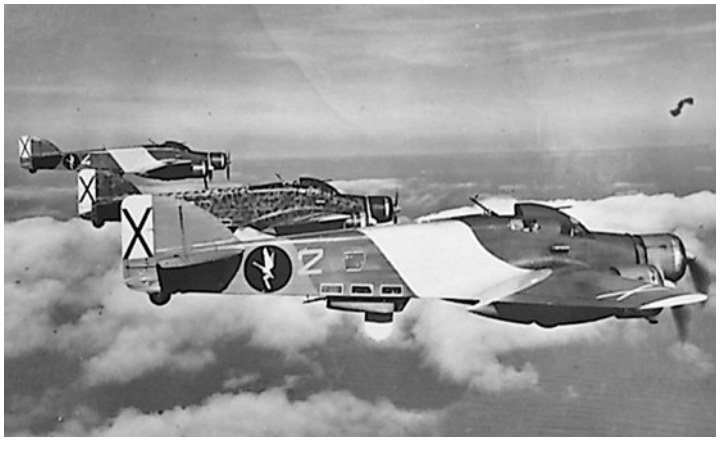
Twenty-four hours later, five 8° *Stormo* S.79s, including three from 52ª *Squadriglia* led by Capitano Quattrociocchi, attacked Cartagena at 1055 hrs, the Italians claiming to have damaged the British steamer *African Explorer*. On 13 February five 8° *Stormo* S.79s (including one from 52ª *Squadriglia* flown by Tenente Putti) bombed Cartagena at 1020 hrs and claimed two destroyers hit. They were attacked by six fighters, one of which hit Tenente Putti's bomber with a single machine gun round. Eight days later, two 52ª *Squadriglia* S.79s flown by Colonnello Leonardi and Capitano Quattrociocchi bombed Alicante railway station at 1040 hrs and were later attacked inconclusively by an I-16 and an I-15. On 28 February Cartagena was bombed again by five 8° *Stormo* trimotors, which damaged the cruiser *Mendez Nuñez* and claimed an I-15 of *Grupo* 26 shot down by defensive fire.

Although the end of the war was now approaching, 8° *Stormo* gave no respite to Cartagena. At 1130 hrs on 5 March five S.79s bombed the town's arsenal and damaged the destroyers *Sanchez Barcaitzegui*, *Lazaga* and *Alcalà Galiano*, leaving them non-seaworthy in dry dock. The very next day another five 8° *Stormo* aircraft targeted Cartagena once again, and on this occasion seven I-15s of *Grupo* 26 were spotted. However, the fighters did not press home their initial attack on the bombers.

To sum up, from 20 January 1938 to 5 March 1939 the S.79 crews claimed 26 ships sunk and 214 damaged. Their peak effectiveness was reached between March and August 1938, when 150 vessels were hit in Spanish ports. In respect to British ship losses, the Italians reported 22 freighters sunk (the British figure was 29) and 52 damaged, with 50 merchant seamen killed and 150 wounded. Altogether, during the war in Spain, Italian and German aircraft sunk 144 ships of all types – predominantly during air raids.

In all, 99 *Sparvieri* were sent to Spain, the Italians flying 65 of them. Just four were lost in action, despite the best efforts of Republican fighter pilots and anti-aircraft batteries. At the conflict's end the remaining 61 S.79s were handed over to the Spanish *Aviación Nacional*.

The outstanding performance and the undisputed success of the S.79 during the Spanish Civil War were loudly trumpeted in fascist propaganda.



On 8 January 1939 these 52ª *Squadriglia* S.79s bombed Valencia railway station. Trimotor 'Blue 2' is in the foreground, leading its two wingmen (*AM*)

This in turn convinced the Italian government, and the Italian people as a whole, that the *Regia Aeronautica* was far more powerful than it actually was. The brutal realities of World War 2, especially in respect to the vulnerability of the *Sparvieri* when engaged by modern British fighters, came as something of a shock to the veterans of the *Aviazione Legionaria* and the *Aviazione delle Baleari*.

IN SPANISH SERVICE

Greatly impressed by the S.79's performance, the Spanish Nationalists decided to purchase several examples for their *Aviación Nacional* during 1937. In May of that year pilots from a disbanded Ju 52/3m group were sent to Italy to undergo intensive flight training prior to returning to Spain with the *Sparvieri*. By mid-August the aircrew had returned home with their first batch of S.79s (eight trimotors coded 28-30 to 28-37). These formed *Grupo* 3-G-28, which was the first of four S.79 Nationalist units, all of which boasted two *escuadrillas* each. Led by Commander Luis Pardo Prieto, *Grupo* 3-G-28 made its combat debut in the last actions of the Battle of Belchite during the first week of September.

Further deliveries of S.79s led to the formation of *Grupos* 4-G-28 and 5-G-28 in the autumn of 1937 (their 18 machines being coded 28-38 to 28-55), and of *Grupo* 6-G-28 (eight trimotors coded 28-56 to 28-63) in May-June 1938.

During the war the 34 Spanish trimotors provided tactical support for Nationalist troops, mainly in continental Spain. Thanks to Italo-German support, I *Brigada Aérea Hispana* was formed, comprising two major bombardment units. *Escuadra* 2 (CO Teniente Coronel Josè Lacalle Larraga) comprised *Grupos* 3-G-28 (CO Luis Pardo) and 4-G-28 (CO Navarro Garnica), while *Escuadra* 3 (CO Teniente Coronel *el Infante* don Alfonso de Orleàns y Borbon) was a mixed unit equipped with Heinkel He 70s and S.79s, the latter belonging to 5-G-28 (CO Gomà).

On 13 January 1938 the Spanish S.79s moved to Burgos, and on 8 April Nationalist fighter ace Joaquin Garcia Morato 'borrowed' the 5-G-28 CO's S.79 to fly a reconnaissance mission over La Cenia airport. The bomber was escorted by no fewer than 17 CR.32 fighters from *Grupo* 2-G-3, which were led by Commander Miguel Garcia Pardo. Despite this strong escort Morato's trimotor was damaged by anti-aircraft fire.

When the Republicans launched their Ebro offensive (which in turn led to the longest and largest battle of the Spanish Civil War) on 25 July, *Aviación Nacional* S.79s were immediately called upon to support Nationalist troops. *Escuadras* 2 and 3 remained at their Alfamén base, although for a short period a number of the Nationalist trimotors moved to Palma de Mallorca to attack Valencia harbour.

On 5 November Spanish S.79s raided Monjos airfield, home of 3ª *Escuadrilla de Chatos.* Capitàn Josè Comas Borras, leader of I-15-equipped *Grupo* 26, was severely wounded by exploding bombs during the raid, later having a leg amputated. The attacks on the Republican airports were intensified two days later, Panadès, Vilafranca, Monjos again, Cervera, El Vendrell and Valls all being heavily bombed. By 31 December the *Aviación*

Nacional S.79 force was operating with *Grupos* 3-, 4-, 5- and 6-G-28, all based around Alfamèn.

With the war's end the Italians ceded their 61 remaining S.79s (coded 28-64 to 28-124) to the *Aviación Nacional* to form *Regimientos de Bombardeo* 11 at Sevilla and 12 at Granada. In the second half of 1939 the *Aviación Nacional* was re-designated the *Ejército del Aire*.

Spanish S.79 units subsequently reported a handful of losses during World War 2, despite the country's strict neutrality. In one instance, on 8 November 1940, S.79s 28-59 and 28-62 of 2ª *Escuadrilla*, *Grupo* 5-G-28 of *Regimiento* 12 *de Bombardeo* – a unit tasked with defending the Balearic islands – took off from Son San Juan at 1436 hrs and headed south on a routine surveillance patrol. At 1536 hrs the crew of 28-59 lost sight of 28-62. Just a few minutes before 28-59's return to base, Son San Juan's control tower intercepted a mayday radio message from 28-62, followed by silence. A search was immediately started, and floating wreckage from the doomed S.79 was found the very next day.

British reports help to reconstruct what happened to the aircraft. At 1734 hrs the S.79 had chanced upon the Royal Navy's Force 'H', busy launching strikes against southern Sardinia, in the Cagliari area – a diversionary tactic for Operation *Judgement* (the strike on Taranto). At 1746 hrs 28-62 made a second pass to the starboard side of the British squadron, following the Force 'H' ships for six minutes. For the British this was enough to justify treating the solitary S.79 as a hostile reconnaissance aeroplane, so the trimotor was attacked by a Fulmar fighter of 808 Naval Air Squadron (NAS) flown by future ace Lt Rupert Tillard. His first attack seemingly killed the S.79's dorsal gunner, after which a second burst sent the trimotor crashing into the sea. Later, having received a British report describing the action, Spanish authorities officially declared 28-62's aircrew as 'fallen in air service'.

Some *Ejército del Aire* S.79s remained in service after the war, flying operationally in the Spanish African colonies of Rio de Oro and Ifni into the early 1960s.

RIGHT
Generale di Squadra Aerea Francesco Pricolo, in the flying suit, led Special *Squadra A*, which was tasked with providing air support for the invasion of Albania. On 10 April 1939 he boldly made a lone landing at Koritza, obtaining the surrender of the local Albanian garrison (*via author*)

ALBANIAN PRELUDE

In March 1939, following the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, the Italian government decided to invade the Kingdom of Albania to 'even the score' somewhat. Operation *Albania* began on 4 April 1939 with deployment of special *Squadra A* (CO Generale Pricolo) aviation units from northern Italy to the southern Apulian airports at Grottaglie, Brindisi and Lecce. In respect to S.79s, *Squadra A*'s Bomber Division was composed of 11° and 12° *Stormi*, while 33° *Stormo* was posted to the Transport Division. In addition, a Mixed Division was made up of 30° and 36° *Stormi*, supported by 6° *Stormo Caccia* CR.32 fighters.

Groundcrewmen manhandle S.79 204-10, flown by Colonnello Attilio Biseo. Note the *gruppo* CO's rank pennant on the fuselage (*AM*)

The trimotors of 12° *Stormo 'Sorci Verdi'* participated in the transportation of 1° *Reggimento Granatieri di Sardegna* Grenadiers to the Albanian capital, Tirana (*via author*)

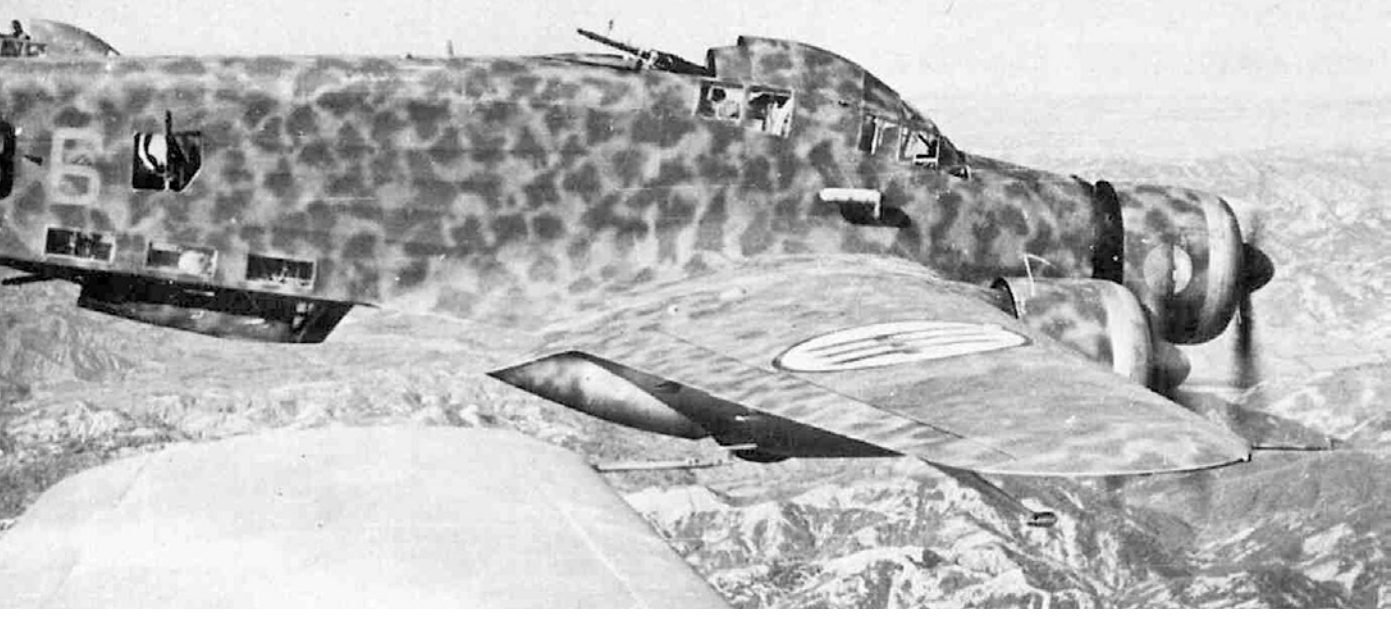
On the morning of 5 April *Regia Aeronautica* Chief of Staff Generale Valle flew one of his individual air raids, reconnoitring Albanian territory and apparently finding things very quiet. Italian troops landed on the Albanian coast on 7 April and met only limited resistance, although some losses were suffered, and then headed for Tirana after seizing the port of Durazzo. The following day Albanian soldiers disabled the bridge over the Arzen river, seriously hampering the Italian troops' march on Tirana.

In an attempt to dissuade Albanian forces from any further acts of sabotage, the Italian government urged the Regia Aeronautica to bomb targets in the Vorra area. Before undertaking this operation, Generale Valle again personally reconnoitred this sector, finding it entirely clear of enemy troops. *Granatieri di Sardegna* troops stationed at Grottaglie were immediately airlifted to Tirana on board S.79s (of 12° *Stormo*) and S.81s. Some hours earlier Generali Ranza and Valle (the latter on board an S.79 from Guidonia) had landed at Tirana airport, where they found total calm, so that they could welcome the incoming airborne Grenadiers.

Two days later, on 10 April, it was Generale Pricolo's turn to deliver a personal coup when he landed at Koritza, guarded by a top-cover of CR.32 fighters. There, he compelled the local Albanian garrison to surrender, this deed earning him the Savoy Military Order. Altogether, between 5 and 10 April, 12° *Stormo* S.79s flew several sorties over Albanian targets, one of them strafing a military strongpoint. To the Italians, the Albanian operation marked a real prelude to their country's debut in the imminent world conflict.

From 1 January 1940 the *Regia Aeronautica*'s *gruppi* unit numbers officially changed from Roman numerals to Arabic. Accordingly, this text follows suit.

On 10 June 1940, when Italy declared war on France and Great Britain, the S.79 force within the *Regia Aeronautica* numbered 612 trimotors, equipping 14 *stormi* and one autonomous *gruppo*.



Sottotenente Mario Ingrellini's 253-6 leads 253-2 and 253-5 (the latter machines flown by Sottotenente Francesco 'Ciccio' Di Bella and Tenente Andrea Berlingieri) from 253ª *Squadriglia* on their way to bomb Bozigrad on 19 November 1940. Over the target, one of the S.79s was damaged by exploding shell splinters. Shortly thereafter, the *Sparvieri* gunners drove off enemy fighters (*via author*)

CHAPTER THREE

WORLD WAR

During offensive operations against France the *Regia Aeronautica* operated over three different fronts, namely the Alpine western front, Corsica and Tunisia. In the first stage of the western front campaign, the Italians avoided wide offensive actions, but things changed after the successful German *Westfeldzug* (Battle of France) campaign launched on 10 May 1940. The Italians attacked France from 21 to 24 June, performing a limited advance within French territory.

Owing to the difficulties posed by mountain warfare, poor weather and stubborn French resistance (the French government accused the Italians of stabbing the country in the back), Italian troops suffered heavy losses. Conversely, the well-fortified French units reported limited casualties. Not so the French civilian population, which suffered terribly during the *Regia Aeronautica*'s bombing raids – the latter were fiercely opposed by the *Armée de l'Air*. After 14 days of fighting the Italian-French armistice was signed on 24 June.

On 11 June, ten days prior to the *Regia Aeronautica* bombing targets in mainland France, three 15° *Stormo* S.79s flew a photo-reconnaissance sortie over Sfax, Ben Gardane and some French fortified redoubts in Tunisia. Two other 228ª *Squadriglia* (89° *Gruppo*, 32° *Stormo*) S.79s led by Tenente Ezio Fantini departed Decimomannu airfield in Sardinia and reconnoitred over Sidi Ahmed, Bizerte and Karouba. That same day, over Corsica, an 11ª *Squadriglia* (26° *Gruppo*, 9° *Stormo*) S.79 of 3ª *Squadra Aerea* flew a

Groundcrew refuel and rearm 11ª *Squadriglia* (26° *Gruppo*, 9° *Stormo*) S.79s at Viterbo airport in June 1940. S.79 11-3 is visible in the background (*AM*)

photo-reconnaissance mission over the Bastia region and Borgo airfield, on which three French fighters were seen.

On 12 June a 256ª *Squadriglia* (36° *Stormo*) S.79 flown by Capitano Arduino Buri (who later became a prominent torpedo-bomber pilot) undertook a photo-reconnaissance flight over Bizerte, where four destroyers, two escort ships and a seaplane-tender were sighted. Buri's aircraft was chased away by three French Morane-Saulnier MS.406 fighters from *Groupe de Chasse* (GC) III/5, but only Adjutant-Chef Buisson managed to fire on the Italian aircraft, without scoring any hits, before the aircraft turned away. One MS.406 subsequently crash-landed after running out of fuel.

Two other 36° *Stormo* S.79s that performed similar missions that day encountered poor weather. Although one of the aircraft managed to overfly Tunis successfully, the other trimotor was forced to abandon its reconnaissance mission over the Sousse area and return to Castelvetrano.

The Tunisian towns of Sousse, Kairouan, Sebka, Kelibia and Bou Ficha were also subjected to photo-reconnaissance on 12 June by two 30° Stormo trimotors, one flown by Tenente Olo Martinelli and the other, S.79 193-3 of 193ª *Squadriglia*, 87° *Gruppo*, flown by Capitano Sergio Crosara. These sorties preceded an attack by 21 S.79s of 32° *Stormo*, led by Colonnello Luigi Gallo, which took off from Decimomannu to bomb the French naval bases around Bizerte. At the Karouba seaplane base the S.79s' bombs struck five out of six three-engined Loire 70 flying boats of *Escadrille* E7, leaving four destroyed and one damaged. At Sidi Ahmed airport the Italian bombers set a depot on fire and hit two twin-engined Caudron C.440 Goéland utility aircraft, destroying one and badly damaging the other. They also slightly damaged an unidentified Bloch aeroplane and set ablaze a stockpile of 200-litre fuel cans.

At the Sebra base two barrage balloons were destroyed, while in Bizerte's Ponty Bay the S.79s sank the support ship *Finisterre* and several bombs fell close to some submarines and the minelayer *Castor*. In addition, Bizerte's railway line was damaged. French anti-aircraft batteries slightly damaged seven of the attacking S.79s. This successful action was recalled by Sottotenente Giuseppe Cimicchi of 38° *Gruppo*'s 50ª *Squadriglia*, a future torpedo-bomber ace, who participated in the attack;

'My task was clear – locate and bomb the French submarine base in Ponty Bay. When I reached the target the other aircraft had dropped their bombs and were all on the return flight. I ordered to the aimer to get ready for the drop. There was Bizerte, the harbour beneath us and there was all the enemy ack-ack concentrating fire at that last isolated and bold aircraft. Some shells did burst really close to us as we flew at a height of 4000 m. I ordered the bomb-bays opened and waited for the aimer to complete aiming and then drop the bombs. Possibly I gave the order slightly in advance, as some bombs fell into the sea. The others struck home. Suddenly unladen, the aircraft gained speed and then jerked in the air from a cannon-shell burst. I banked successfully and at once I was back over the sea, its blue

colour looking brighter than ever to me. The mission was completed with the sinking of the ship *Finisterre* and the damaging of the *Castor*, along with some submarines and the railway line.'

On 13 June 14 30° *Stormo* and 19 36° *Stormo* S.79s, escorted by 15 1° *Stormo Caccia* Fiat CR.42 fighters, targeted French airports around Tunis. French fighters that attacked the 36° *Stormo* trimotors were driven off by the CR.42s. Later that day a 33° *Stormo* S.79 from Libya reconnoitred the Gabes-Medenine-Ben Gardane area in search of French troops. Several 9° *Stormo* S.79s also reconnoitred both Corsican and southern French targets, trimotors of 13ª *Squadriglia* (26° *Gruppo*) flying over Ghisonaccia, Travo Portovecchio and Bonifacio. Meanwhile, 62ª *Squadriglia* (29° *Gruppo*) aircraft flew along the Golo river and Biguglia regions of Corsica, as well as Toulon. Nine 26° *Gruppo* S.79s took off to attack a French naval formation spotted off the Italian port town of Bordighera, but after reaching the limit of their range they turned back without sighting any enemy vessels.

Maggiore Galeazzo Ciano, CO of 105° *Gruppo*, is welcomed at Pisa-San Giusto airfield after an inconclusive search for French warships that had shelled Ligurian targets on 14 June 1940. Amongst the individuals visible here are 46° *Stormo* CO Colonnello Umberto Nannini (third from left), Ciano's co-pilot Tenente Colonnello Giuseppe Casero (sixth from left), Maggiore Ciano (eighth from left) and observer Capitano Alessandro Pavolini (second from right, straightening his hair). Ciano's frequent mount, S.79 254-1, provides the background to this photograph (*via author*)

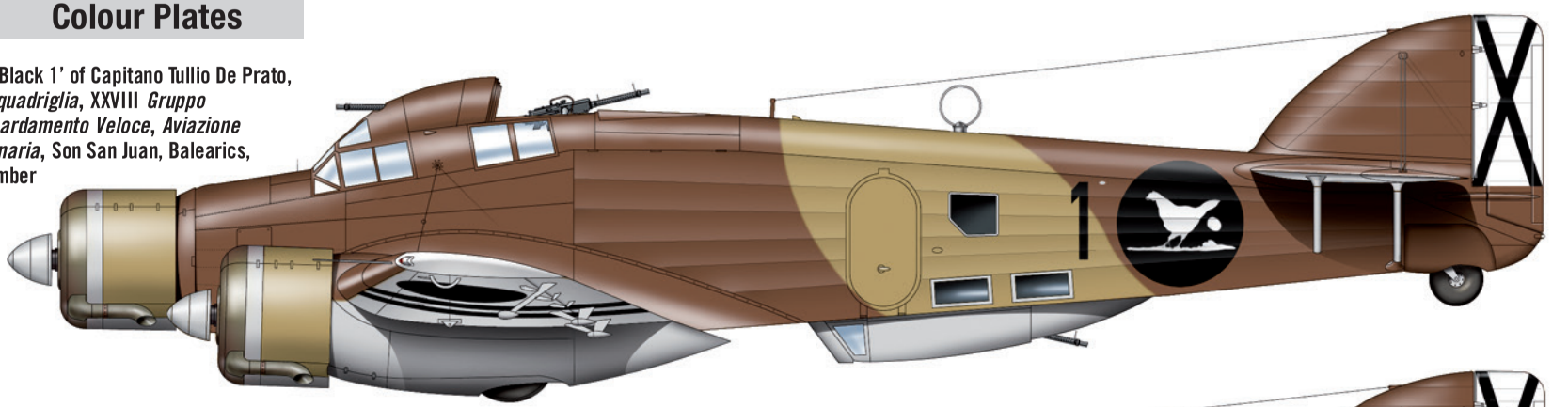
The following day ten 105° *Gruppo* (46° *Stormo*) S.79s, led by Maggiori Remo Cadringher and Galeazzo Ciano (the latter in 254-1), tried to intercept the French naval squadron that had shelled Vado Ligure and Genoa earlier that morning. However, the trimotors failed to find any warships and duly turned back. Maggiore Ciano's crew in 254-1 included Spanish Civil War veteran Tenente Colonnello Giuseppe Casero as co-pilot and Capitano Alessandro Pavolini as observer. Pavolini was prominent in the Fascist Party hierarchy and Minister for Popular Culture. More notable was Foreign Affairs Minister Count Ciano (Mussolini's son-in-law). Ciano's crew also boasted bomb-aimer Tenente Urbano Mancini, who later achieved fame as torpedo-bomber ace.

On 15 June six 11ª *Squadriglia* S.79s bombed Ghisonaccia airport, encountering only feeble anti-aircraft fire. Nevertheless, S.79 MM22018 failed to return from the mission, and was the subject of an unsuccessful search by a 13ª *Squadriglia* trimotor. Five 105° *Gruppo* S.79s led by Maggiore Ciano in 254-1, with Casero, Pavolini and Mancini on board as on the previous day, escorted by nine 22° *Gruppo* (52° *Stormo*) Fiat G.50 fighters, bombed the port of Calvi. The trimotors succeeded in hitting a quay within the harbour. During a subsequent attack off Cape Corso, Bastia and Calvi, two 104° *Gruppo* (46° *Stormo*) S.79s failed to hit a freighter. Six 10ª *Squadriglia* (28° *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo*) S.79s led by Spanish war veteran Capitano Michele Banchio and escorted by six 155ª *Squadriglia* (3° *Gruppo*, 6° *Stormo*) CR.32s were diverted from their scheduled Campo dell'Oro objective owing to poor weather and directed to the Golfo di Valinco as a target of opportunity.

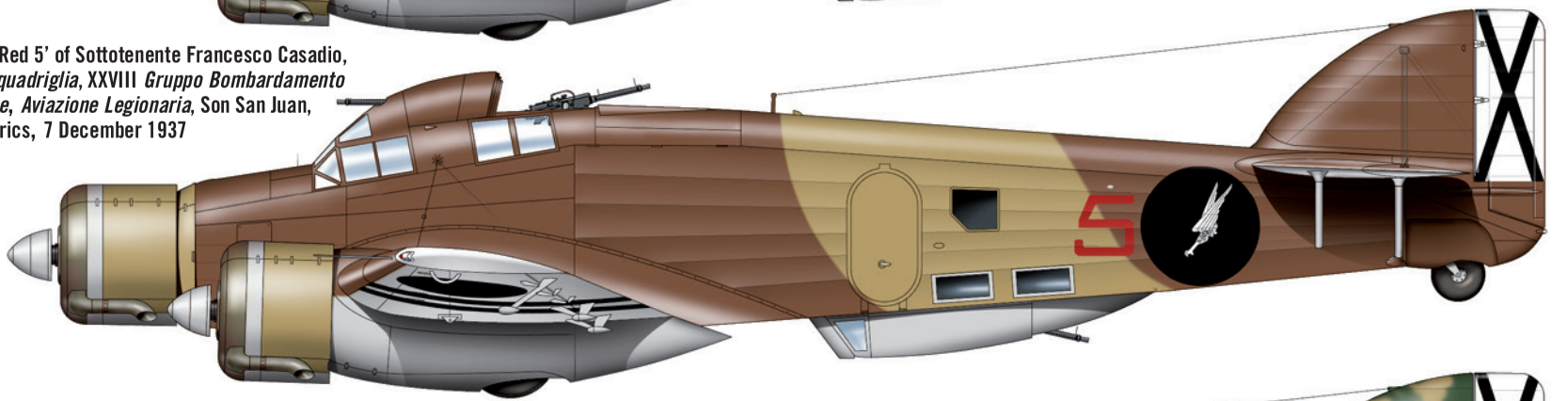
At 0640 hrs on 16 June six 10ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Aurelio Baisi attacked the Corsican Campo dell'Oro airfield near Ajaccio, but 19 of the 22 bombs dropped missed the target. (*text continues on page 46*)

Colour Plates

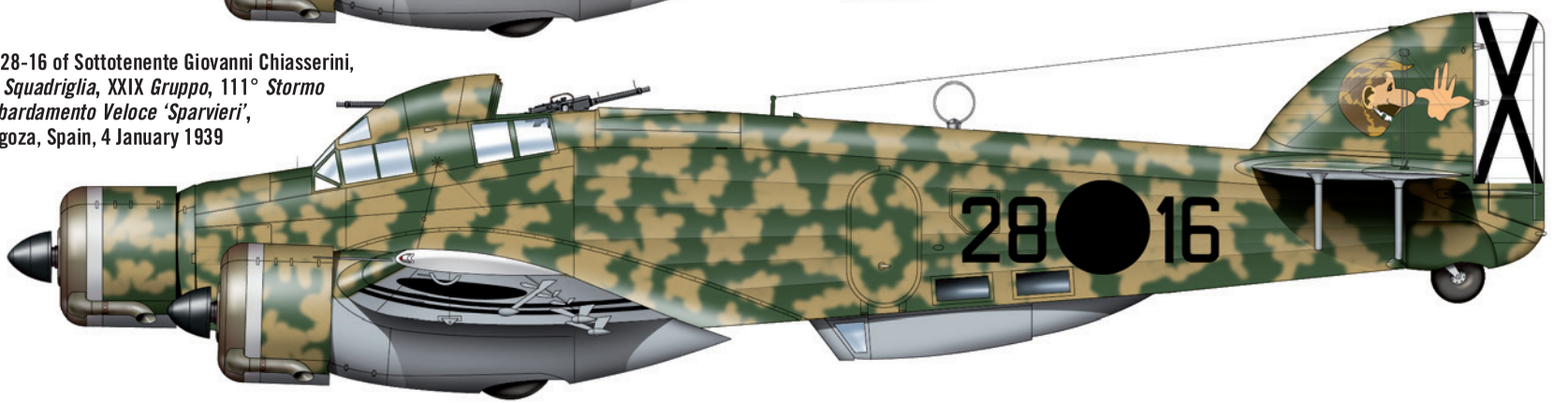
1
S.79 'Black 1' of Capitano Tullio De Prato, 10ª *Squadriglia*, XXVIII *Gruppo Bombardamento Veloce*, *Aviazione Legionaria*, Son San Juan, Balearics, December 1937



2
S.79 'Red 5' of Sottotenente Francesco Casadio, 19ª *Squadriglia*, XXVIII *Gruppo Bombardamento Veloce*, *Aviazione Legionaria*, Son San Juan, Balearics, 7 December 1937

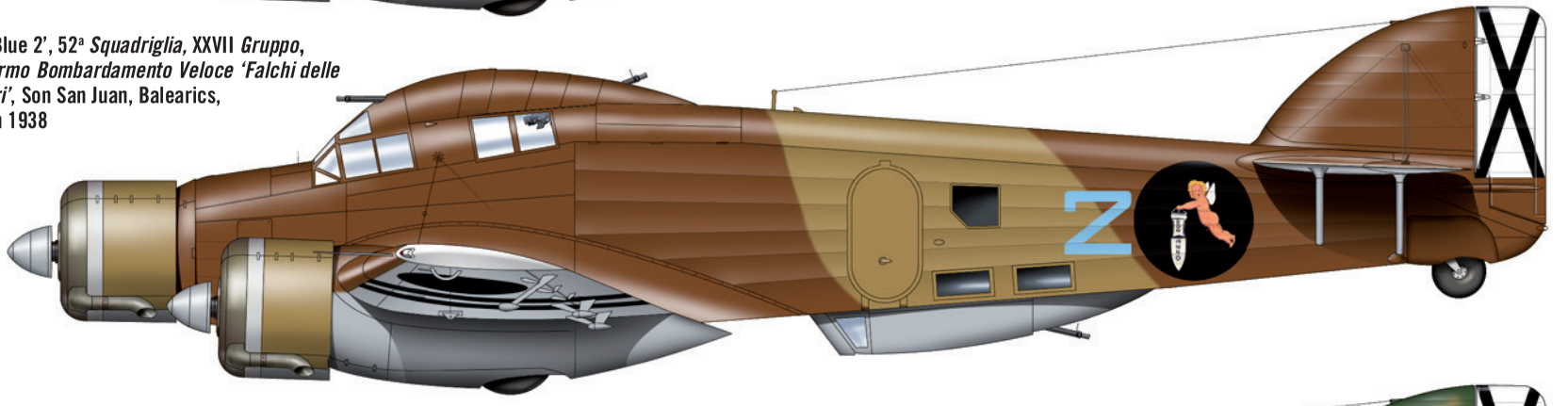


3
S.79 28-16 of Sottotenente Giovanni Chiasserini, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo*, 111° *Stormo Bombardamento Veloce 'Sparvieri'*, Zaragoza, Spain, 4 January 1939

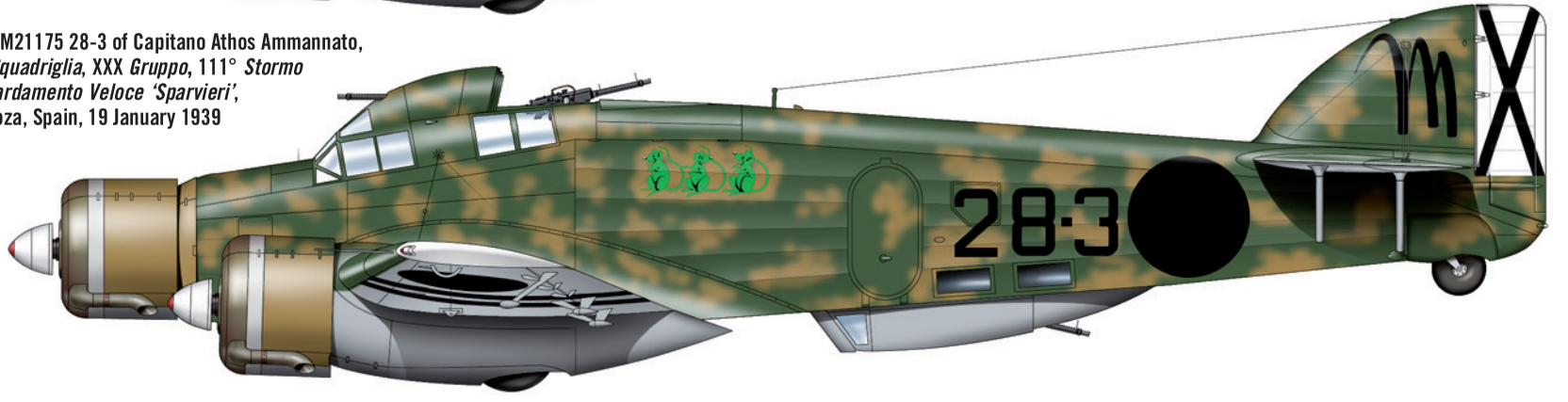


4
S.79 28-2 of Maggiore Mario Aramu, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo Bombardamento Veloce*, Soria, Spain, May 1937

5
S.79 'Blue 2', 52ª *Squadriglia*, XXVII *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo Bombardamento Veloce 'Falchi delle Baleari'*, Son San Juan, Balearics, lMarch 1938

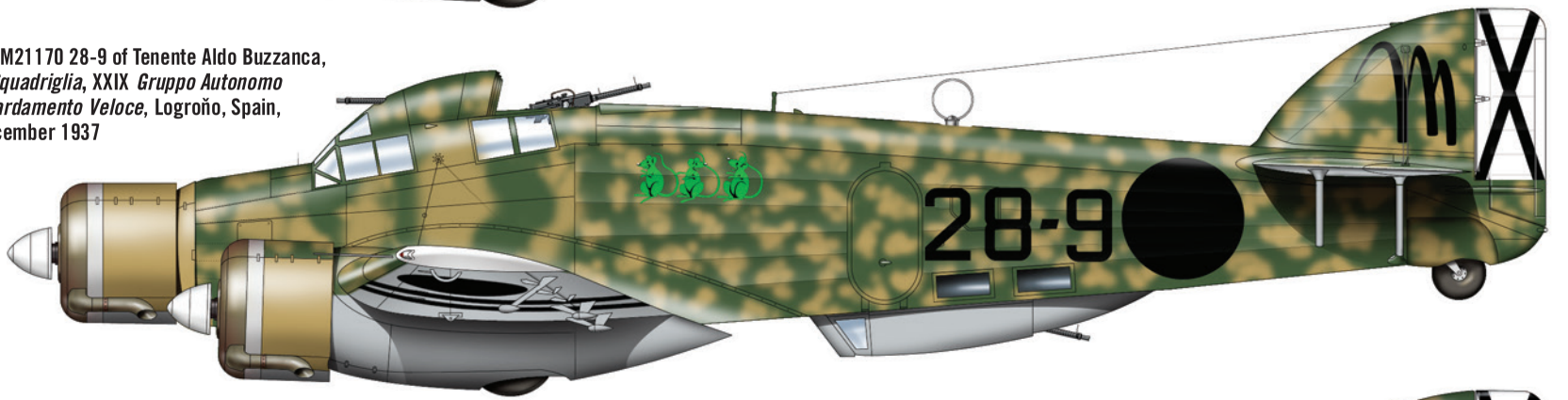


6
S.79 MM21175 28-3 of Capitano Athos Ammannato, 285ª *Squadriglia*, XXX *Gruppo*, 111° *Stormo Bombardamento Veloce 'Sparvieri'*, Zaragoza, Spain, 19 January 1939



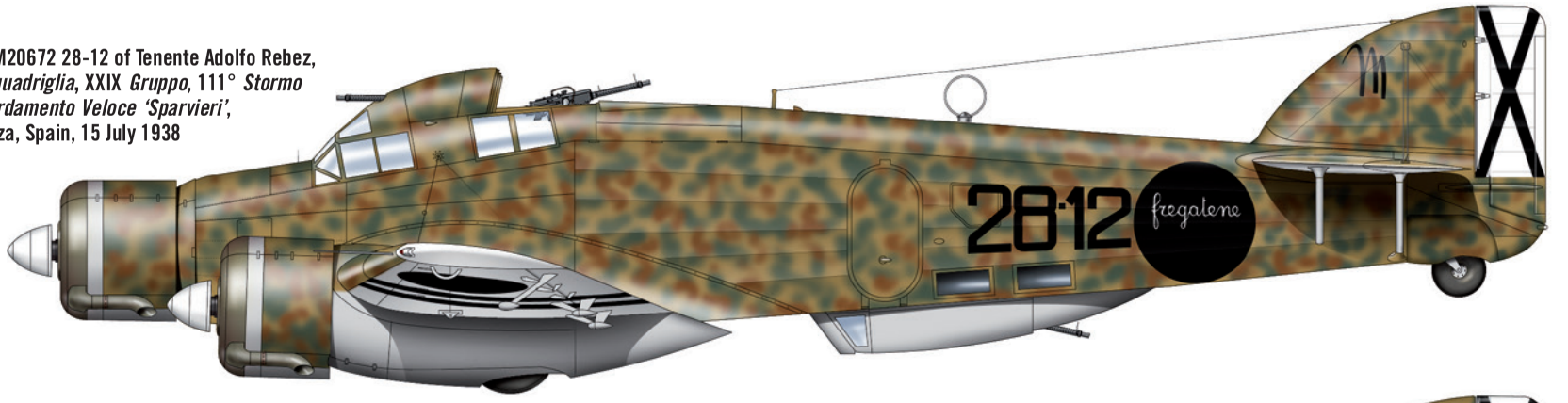
7
S.79 MM21165 28-6 of Tenente Giovanni Canepa, 285ª *Squadriglia,* XXIX *Gruppo Autonomo Bombardamento Veloce*, Logroño, Spain, December 1937

8
S.79 MM21170 28-9 of Tenente Aldo Buzzanca, 285ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo Autonomo Bombardamento Veloce*, Logroño, Spain, 14 December 1937



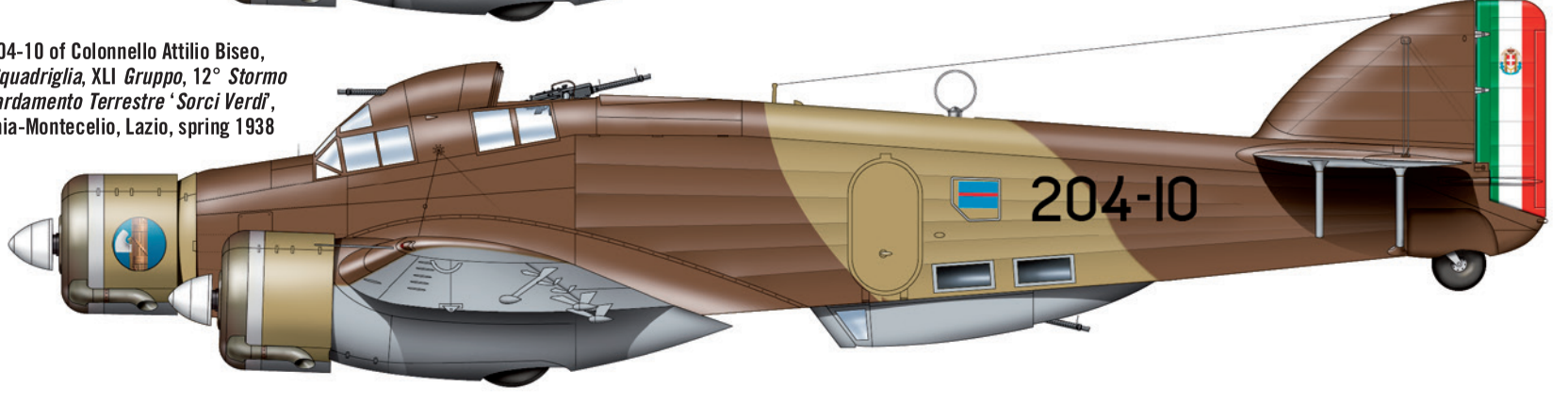
9
S.79 MM21380 28-11 of Tenente Colonnello Ranieri Cupini, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo Autonomo Bombardamento Veloce*, Soria, Spain, autumn 1937

10
S.79 MM20672 28-12 of Tenente Adolfo Rebez, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo*, 111° *Stormo Bombardamento Veloce 'Sparvieri'*, Zaragoza, Spain, 15 July 1938

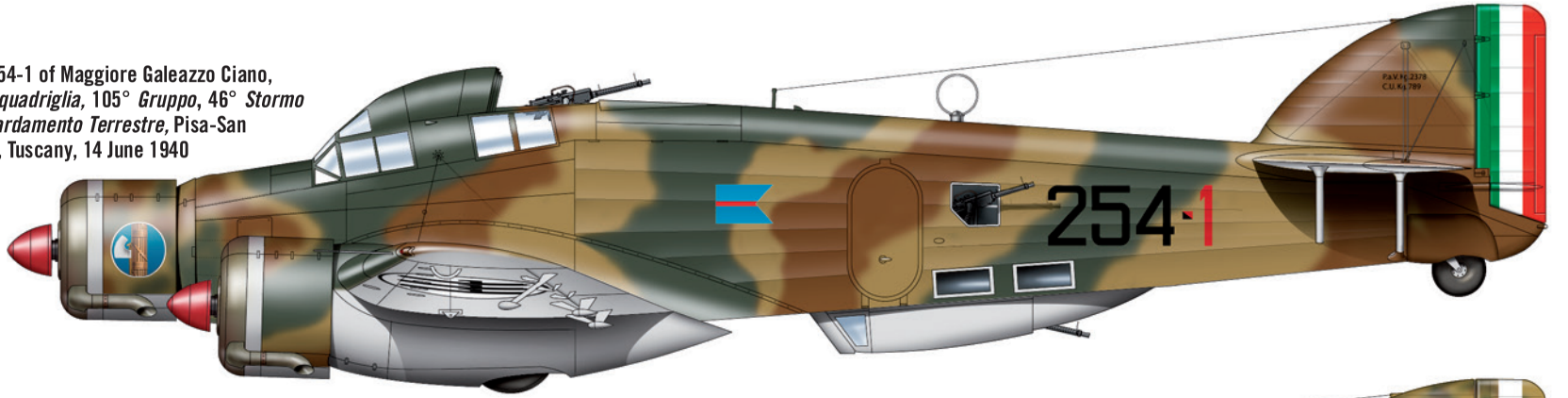


11
S.79 28-14 of Tenente Paolo Moci, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo Autonomo Bombardamento Veloce*, Logroño, Spain, 23 November 1937

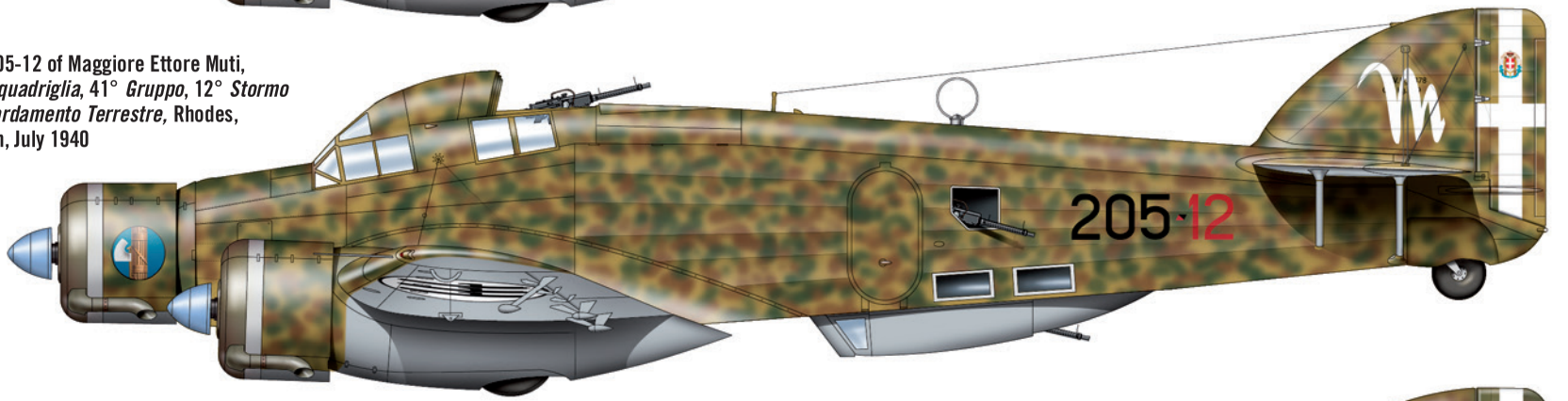
12
S.79 204-10 of Colonnello Attilio Biseo, 204ª *Squadriglia*, XLI *Gruppo*, 12° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre 'Sorci Verdi'*, Guidonia-Montecelio, Lazio, spring 1938



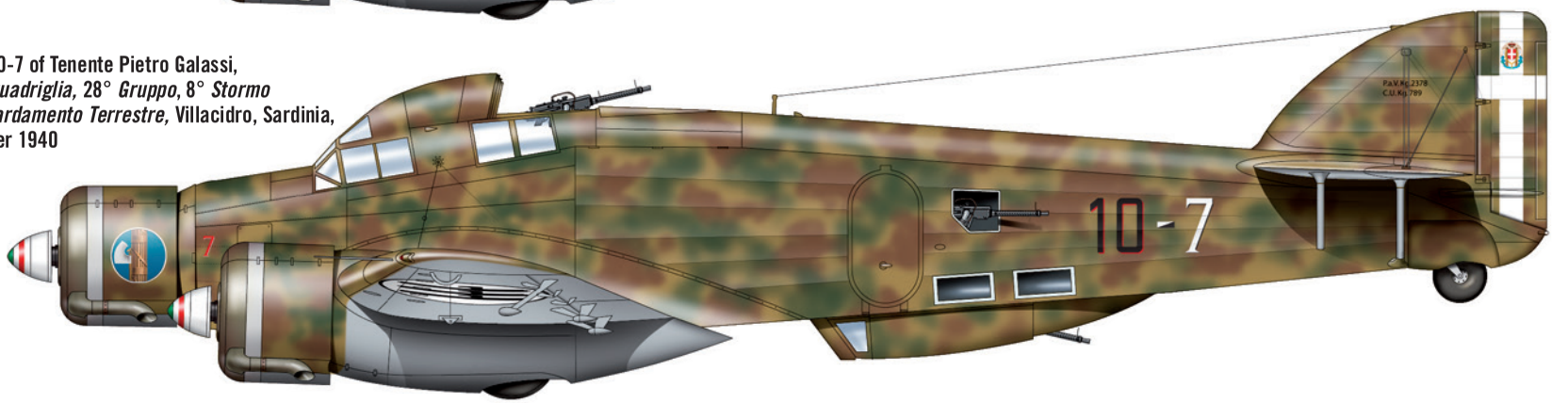
13
S.79 254-1 of Maggiore Galeazzo Ciano, 254ª *Squadriglia,* 105° *Gruppo*, 46° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre,* Pisa-San Giusto, Tuscany, 14 June 1940



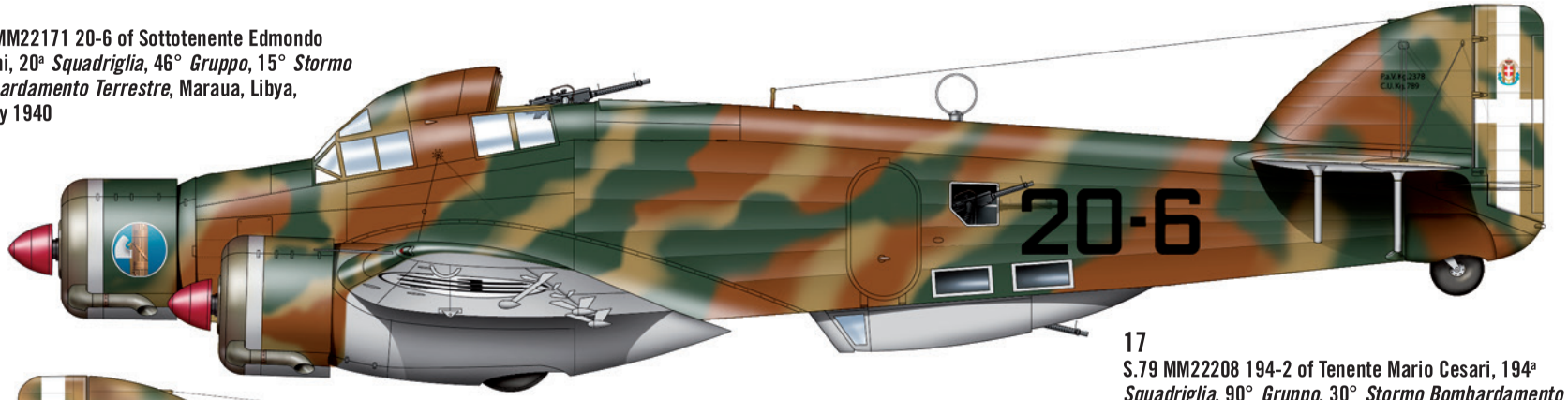
14
S.79 205-12 of Maggiore Ettore Muti, 205ª *Squadriglia*, 41° *Gruppo*, 12° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre,* Rhodes, Aegean, July 1940



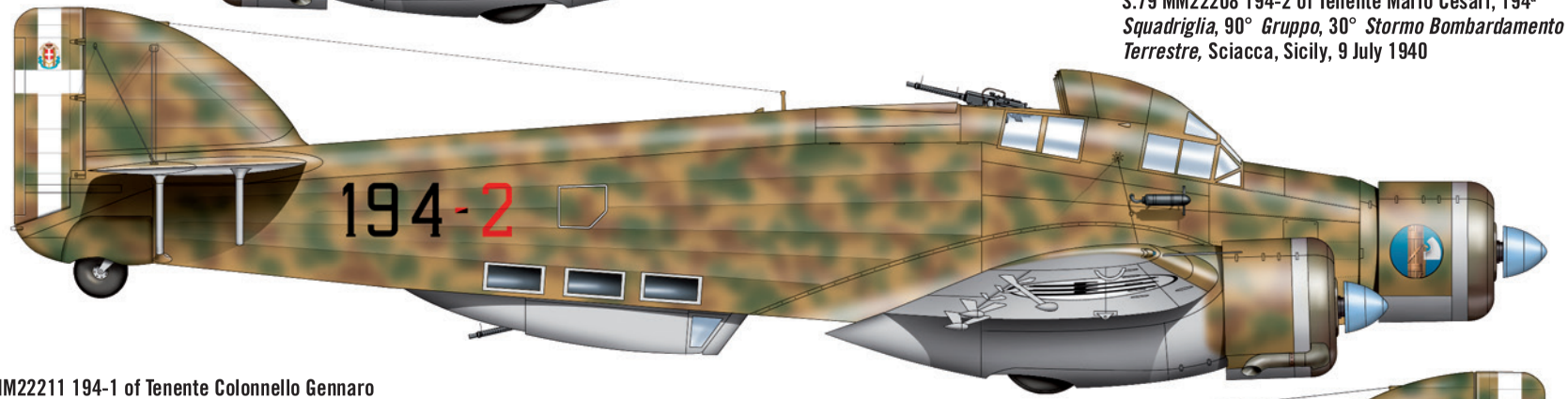
15
S.79 10-7 of Tenente Pietro Galassi, 10ª *Squadriglia,* 28° *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre,* Villacidro, Sardinia, summer 1940



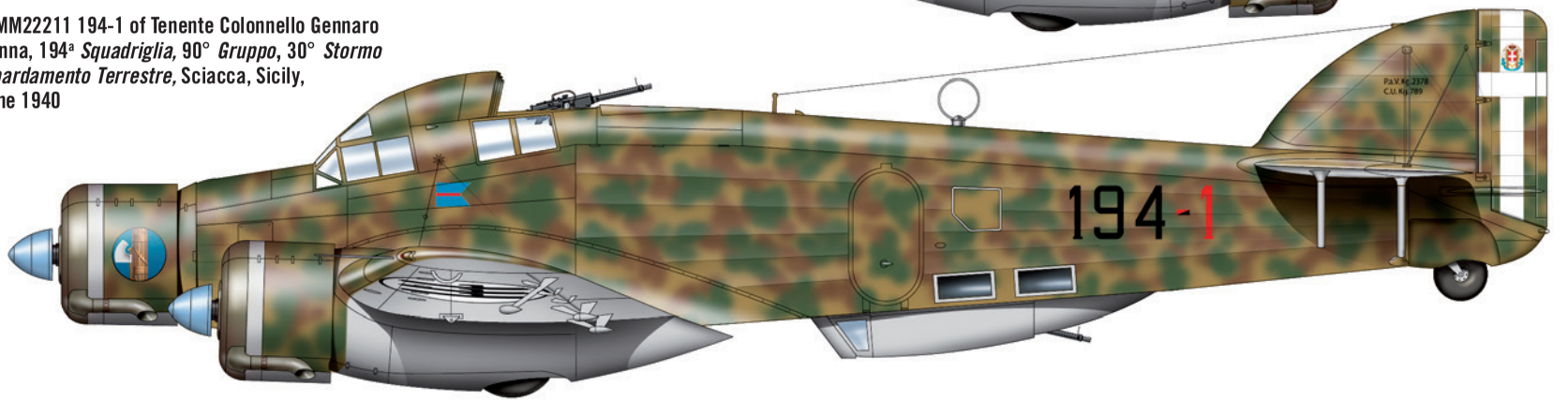
16
S.79 MM22171 20-6 of Sottotenente Edmondo Pistani, 20ª *Squadriglia*, 46° *Gruppo*, 15° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Maraua, Libya, 13 July 1940



17
S.79 MM22208 194-2 of Tenente Mario Cesari, 194ª *Squadriglia*, 90° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre,* Sciacca, Sicily, 9 July 1940

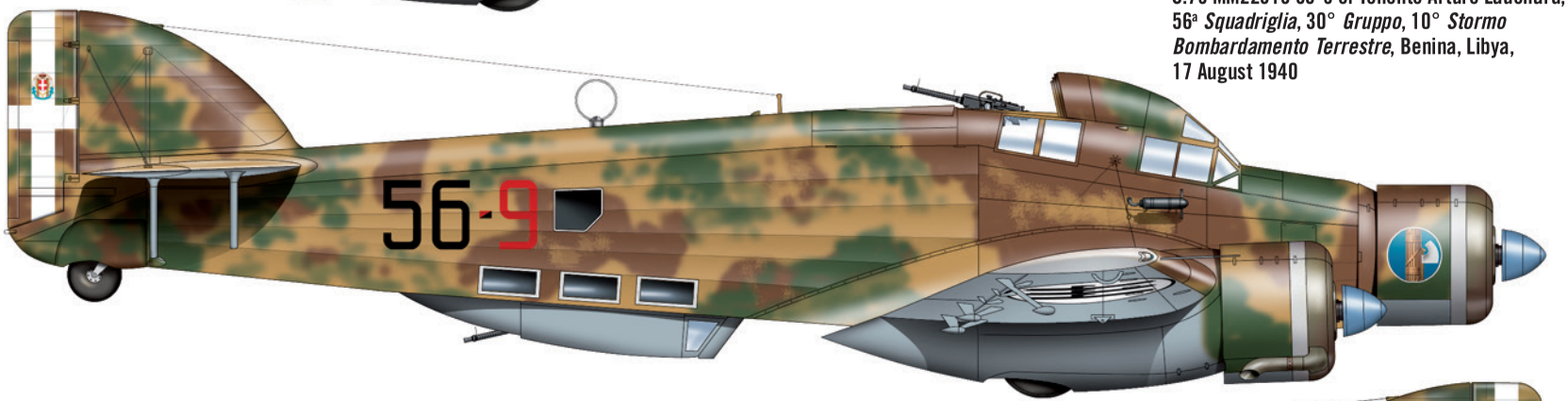


18
S.79 MM22211 194-1 of Tenente Colonnello Gennaro Lamanna, 194ª *Squadriglia,* 90° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre,* Sciacca, Sicily, 21 June 1940

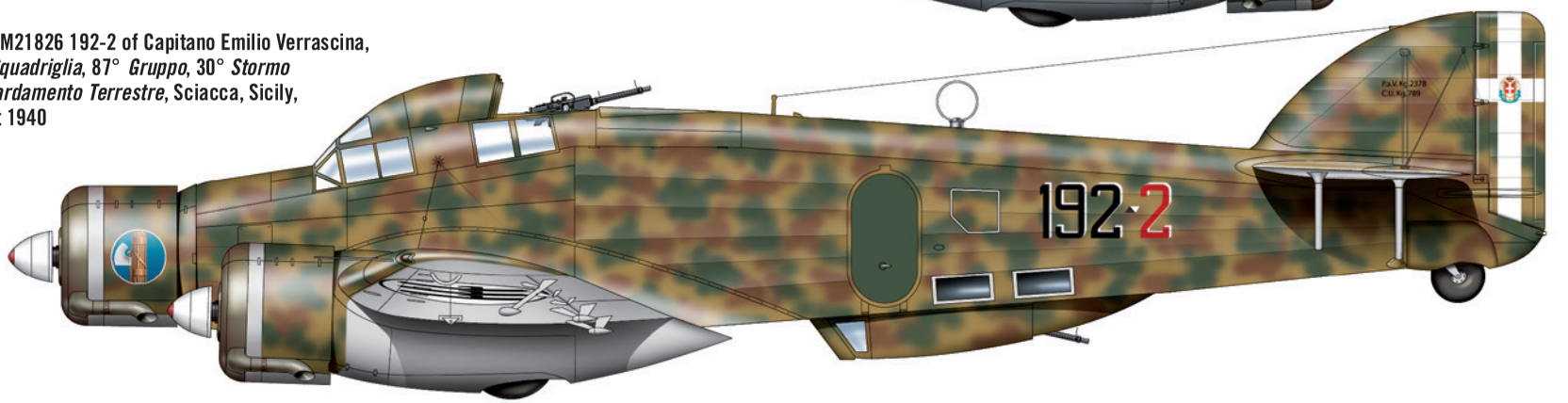


19
S.79 (serial unknown) 6-6 of 6ª *Squadriglia*, 44° *Gruppo bis Bombardamento Terrestre*, Addis Ababa, Abyssinia, April 1941

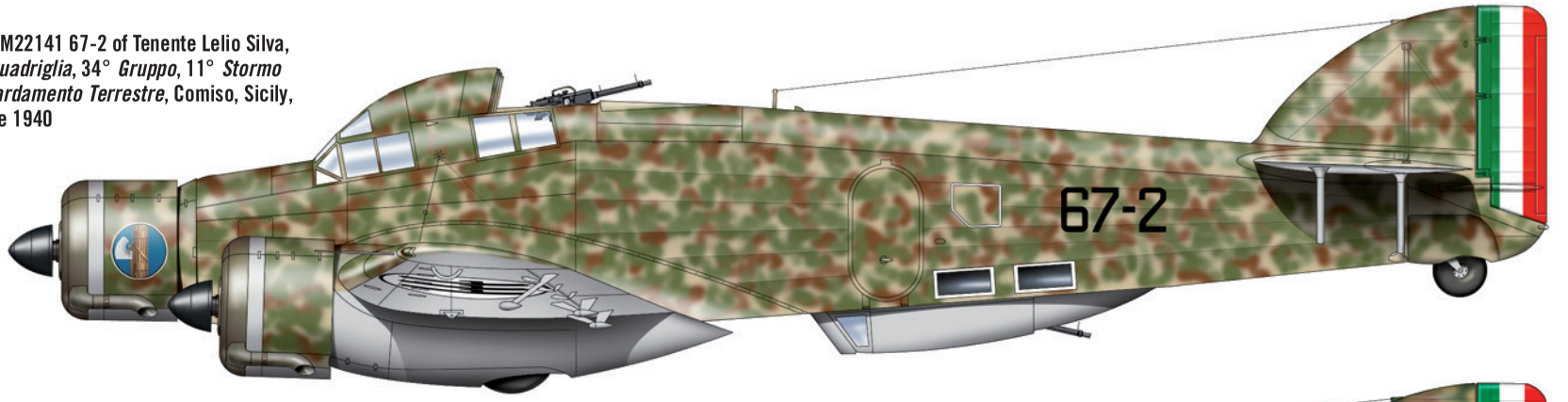
20
S.79 MM22313 56-9 of Tenente Arturo Lauchard, 56ª *Squadriglia*, 30° *Gruppo*, 10° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Benina, Libya, 17 August 1940



21
S.79 MM21826 192-2 of Capitano Emilio Verrascina, 192ª *Squadriglia*, 87° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Sciacca, Sicily, August 1940



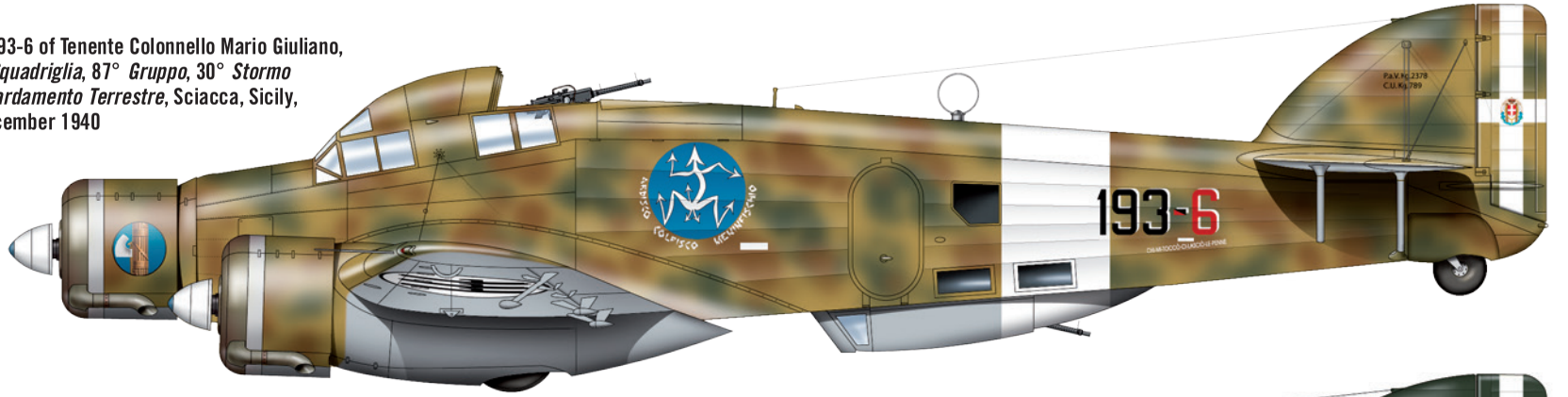
22
S.79 MM22141 67-2 of Tenente Lelio Silva, 67ª *Squadriglia*, 34° *Gruppo*, 11° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Comiso, Sicily, 11 June 1940



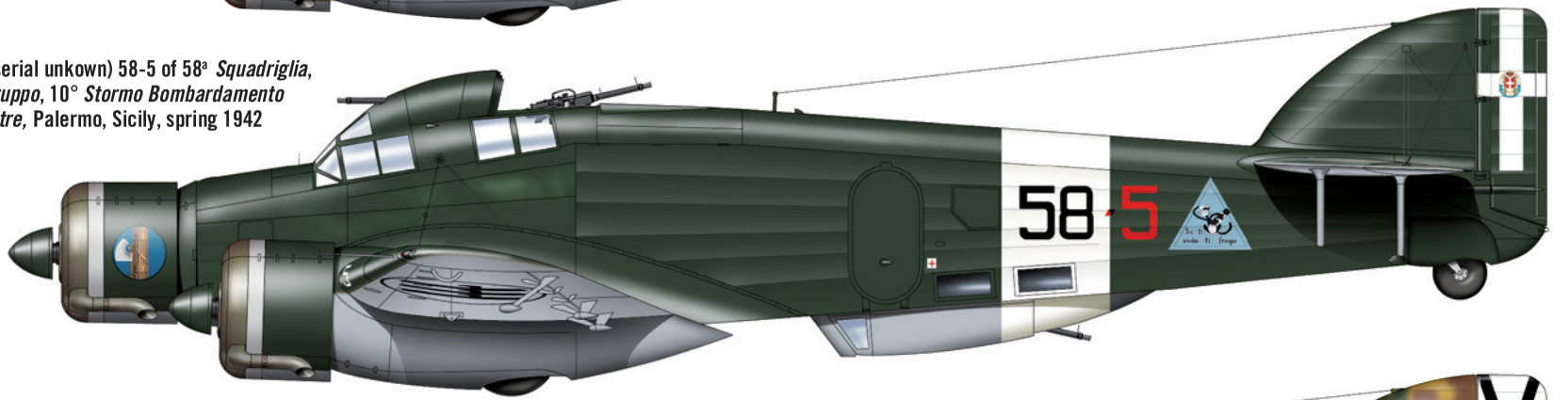
23
S.79 MM21412 68-7 of Sottotenente Mario Massera, 68ª *Squadriglia*, 34° *Gruppo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Rhodes, Aegean, 30 June 1940

24
S.79 253-6 of Sottotenente Mario Ingrellini, 253ª *Squadriglia*, 104° *Gruppo*, 46° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Tirana, Albania, 19 November 1940

25
S.79 193-6 of Tenente Colonnello Mario Giuliano, 193ª *Squadriglia*, 87° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Sciacca, Sicily, 27 December 1940

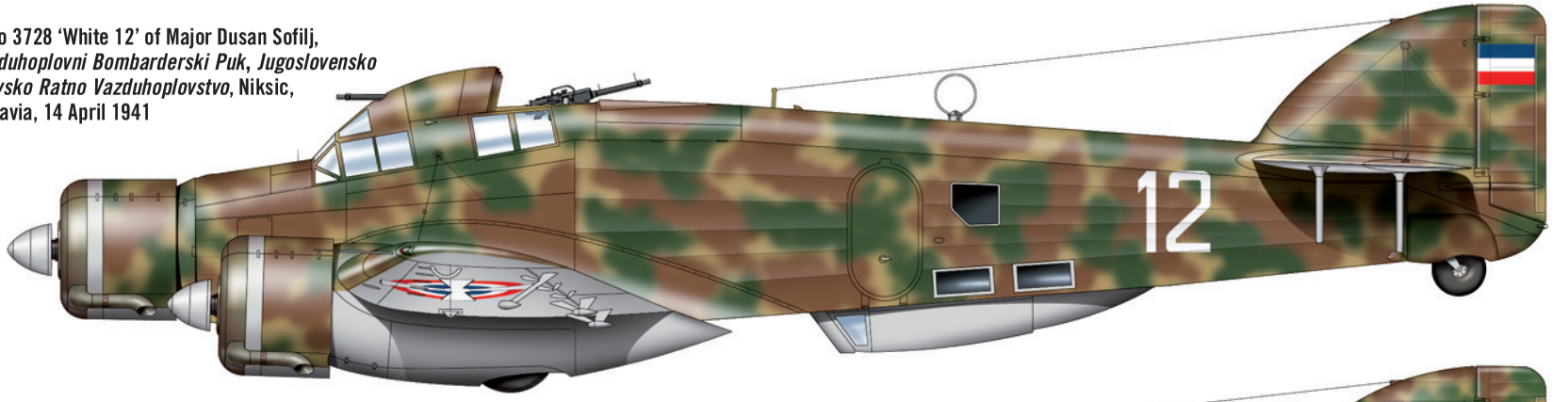


26
S.79 (serial unkown) 58-5 of 58ª *Squadriglia*, 32° *Gruppo*, 10° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre,* Palermo, Sicily, spring 1942



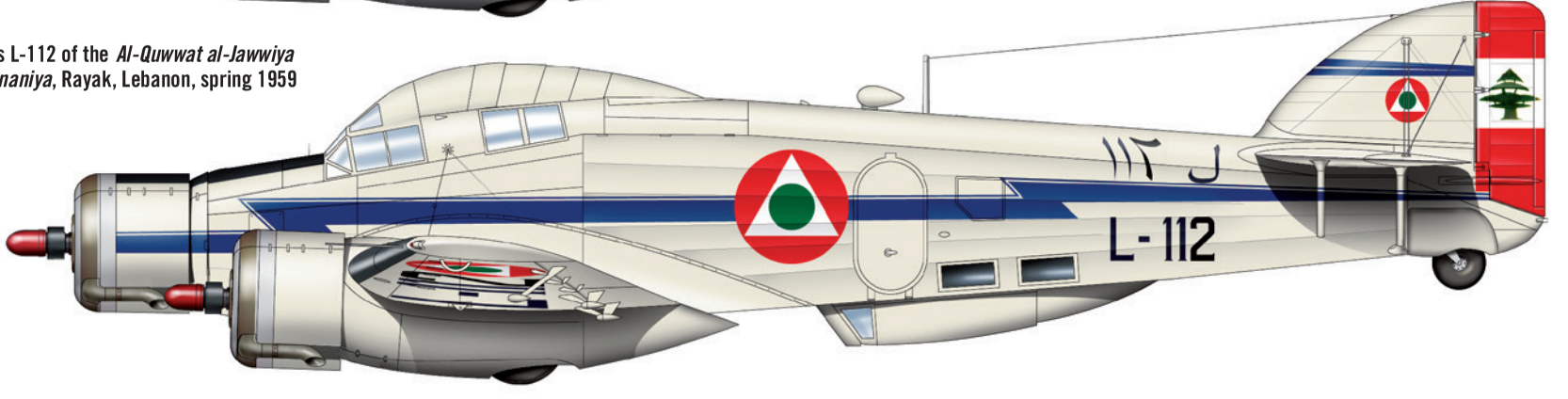
27
S.79 (serial unkown) 28-62 of 2ª *Escuadrilla*, *Grupo* 5-G-28, *Regimiento* 12 *de Bombardeo*, Son San Juan, Balearics, 8 November 1940

28
S.79 No 3728 'White 12' of Major Dusan Sofilj, 7. *Vazduhoplovni Bombarderski Puk*, *Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplovstvo*, Niksic, Yugoslavia, 14 April 1941



29
S.79 No 3712 'Black 14' of 81. *Samolstalna Vazduhoplovna Bombarderska Grupa*, *Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplovstvo*, Mostar, Yugoslavia, April 1941

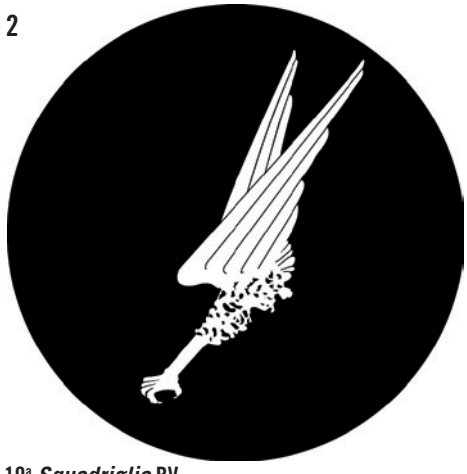
30
S.79bis L-112 of the *Al-Quwwat al-Jawwiya al-Lubnaniya*, Rayak, Lebanon, spring 1959



1

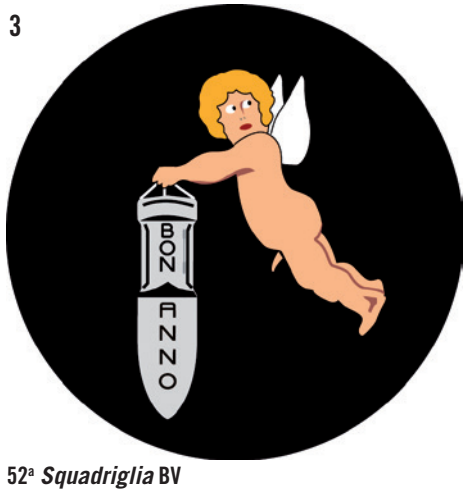
10ª *Squadriglia* BV

2



19ª *Squadriglia* BV

3



52ª *Squadriglia* BV

4

111° *Stormo* BV

5

8° *Stormo* BV

6

12° *Stormo* BT

7

18ª *Squadriglia* BV

8

105° *Gruppo* BT

9

193ª *Squadriglia* BT

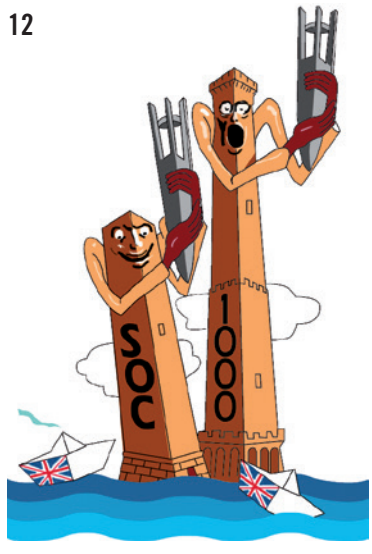
10

217ª *Squadriglia* BT

11

32° *Stormo* BT

12



36° *Stormo* BT

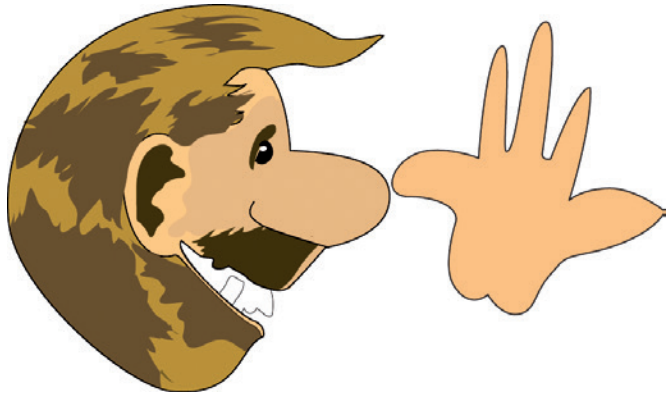
13

58ª *Squadriglia* BT

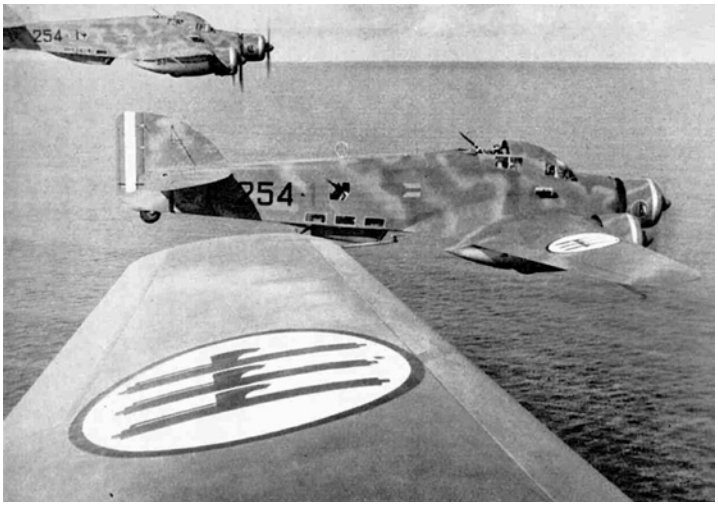
14

60ª *Squadriglia* BT

15



280ª *Squadriglia*



Maggiore Ciano's favoured S.79, 254-1, was photographed here flying over the Tyrrhenian Sea with two other trimotors from 254ª *Squadriglia* in June 1940 (*via author*)

Overcast conditions prevented a 62ª *Squadriglia* (9° *Stormo*) S.79 from dropping leaflets on several Corsican towns, the trimotor being forced to return to base. Two 105° *Gruppo* (46° *Stormo*) S.79s, one of which was 254-2 flown by Capitano Aldo Vitali, searched for shipping off Sanremo but bombed four vessels inconclusively. Similarly inconclusive was a search for enemy warships south of Genoa by five 253ª *Squadriglia* (104° Gruppo, 46° Stormo) S.79s.

That same day three 36° *Stormo* S.79s raided Ksar Said (Sottotenente Soldati's 257-2 bombing this target), Menzel Temime, El Alouina and El Djem airfields. That night, between 2150 hrs and 0030 hrs, five 8° *Stormo* S.79s led by 36-year-old *Generale di Brigata Aerea* Stefano Cagna (a former Atlantic flyer, AOC X *Brigata Aerea* 'Marte' of *Aeronautica della Sardegna* and the youngest Italian general to date) raided Bizerte naval base, scoring hits on several buildings, submarine moorings and a quay. Finally, an *Aeronautica della Libia* S.79 reconnoitred the Tunisian border without sighting any French troop movements.

In Tunisia on 17 June, a 256ª *Squadriglia* (36° *Stormo*) S.79 flown by Capitano Carlo Maccagno that was targeting El Djem at 1100 hrs came under attack from an MS.406 of GC II/9's 2e *Escadrille*. The French fighter, flown by Czech pilot Sous-Lt Vlastimil Vezely, damaged the S.79's port wingtip, although the Italian bomber duly returned to base at 1300 hrs. A second 36° *Stormo* S.79 successfully photographed Bizerte naval base that same morning. Several hours later, five 254ª *Squadriglia Sparvieri* led by Maggiore Ciano's 254-1 (with Casero, Pavolini and Mancini again on board), escorted by six 22° *Gruppo* G.50s from Pontedera, accurately bombed Corsica's Borgo airport. A 63ª *Squadriglia* (9° *Stormo*) S.79 reconnoitring along the eastern Corsican coast sighted a downed trimotor not far from Borgo airport, this aircraft being identified as S.79 MM22018, missing from the 15 June attack on Ghisonaccia airport. Elsewhere, two 49ª *Squadriglia* (38° *Gruppo*, 32° *Stormo*) S.79s overflew Corsica's western coast but spotted nothing.

The following day a 62ª *Squadriglia* (9° *Stormo*) S.79 dropped leaflets on several Corsican towns, and through the late afternoon a 259ª *Squadriglia* trimotor took photographs over the Bizerte area.

On the morning of 19 June 11 S.79s from 13ª and 63ª *Squadriglie* (9° *Stormo*) bombed Borgo airport and Ghisonaccia station, while seven 205ª *Squadriglia* (41° *Gruppo*) S.79s led by Maggiore Ettore Muti in 205-12 bombed the runways at Ghisonaccia. Five 18ª and six 19ª *Squadriglie* (8° *Stormo*) S.79s bombed Calvi (Sainte Catherine Est) and Campo dell'Oro airfields at 1030 hrs and 0940 hrs, respectively – at Calvi, just one cistern(!) was damaged, while a photographic vehicle was destroyed at Campo dell'Oro.

On the night of 19/20 June six 36° Stormo S.79s raided Bizerte submarine base, encountering fierce anti-aircraft fire. Three of the *Sparvieri* were from

258ª *Squadriglia*, namely MM22136/258-9 (Colonnello Carlo Drago), MM22214/258-1 (Capitano Mario Profumi) and MM21446/258-5 (Tenente Bartolomeo Tomasino). The remaining three S.79s were from 259ª *Squadriglia*, 259-5 (Maggiore Vicenzi), 259-1 (Tenente Eugenio Geymet) and 259-9 (Sottotenente Amleto Savini). Three of the aircraft, 258-1, 259-5 and 259-1, turned back due to poor weather, while the remaining S.79s bombed the target. Splinters from exploding anti-aircraft shells struck Savini's 259-9, but the crew were unharmed.

At 0900 hrs the next morning (20 June), a single 256ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Capitano Arduino Buri took photos of Bizerte, sighting several ships in the nearby roadstead. Targeted by accurate anti-aircraft fire, the *Sparviero* was hit by six shell splinters but it returned to base at Castelvetrano at 1215 hrs. That same afternoon at 1530 hrs, 15 204ª and 205ª *Squadriglie* machines led by Maggiore Ettore Muti hit Ghisonaccia airfield. Opposed by negligible anti-aircraft fire, all of Maggiore Muti's 'boys' landed back at base at 1800 hrs.

On the night of 20/21 June the Italians despatched at least two S.79 formations to bomb several French vessels moored in Bizerte naval base. First to attack were four aircraft of 36° *Stormo*'s 108° *Gruppo* (two each from 256ª and 257ª *Squadriglie*), but strong anti-aircraft fire prevented crews from assessing the results – a 256ª *Squadriglia* aircraft flown by Tenente Giorgio Sacchetti was hit by three shell splinters. The second attack was made by five 194ª *Squadriglia* (90° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo*) aircraft led by Tenente Colonnello Gennaro Lamanna in MM22211/194-1. The 194ª *Squadriglia* machines, including Tenente Mario Cesari in MM22208/194-2, claimed a cruiser and three seaplanes set ablaze in Lac de Bizerte, and were opposed by fierce but inaccurate anti-aircraft fire.

To verify bombing results in the Bizerte area, S.79 259-8, flown by Tenente Luigi Atti of 36° *Stormo*'s 109° *Gruppo*, was despatched at 1020 hrs on 21 June. The aircraft was intercepted by a GC III/5 MS.406 flown by Lt Moran before it reached Bizerte, however, the trimotor being holed and having its central engine damaged during the brief engagement. Atti returned to base at 1225 hrs with four slightly wounded crew on board – both pilots were unharmed. Moran, forced to abandon the chase owing to a shortage of fuel, was credited with a probable kill.

Groundcrew from 36° *Stormo* repair holed S.79 259-8 of 109° *Gruppo*. The 259ª *Squadriglia* trimotor, flown by Tenente Luigi Atti, was engaged by the French MS.406 fighter of GC III/5's Lt Moran while reconnoitring Bizerte on 21 June 1940 (*via author*)

Later that same day nine 104° *Gruppo* S.79s led by 46° *Stormo* CO Colonnello Umberto Nannini attacked military targets around Marseille, dropping 54 100 kg mine-bombs. The bombers were opposed by concentrated anti-aircraft fire and 20 French fighters, which attempted an interception but were driven off. This air raid caused heavy loss of life among French civilians, killing 143 and wounding 136. That same afternoon nine 10ª and 52ª

Squadriglie S.79s of 8° *Stormo* bombed four French vessels, but their aim was marred by cloudy weather.

In the early hours of 22 June S.79s again bombed the Bizerte area, two formations, one six-strong from 258ª *Squadriglia* (109° *Gruppo*) and the other composed of ten 87° *Gruppo* (30° *Stormo*) trimotors (five each from 192ª and 193ª *Squadriglie*), being escorted by five 1° *Stormo* CR.42s from Trapani. The *Sparvieri* battered their targets, 258ª *Squadriglia* reporting fires in fuel dumps and in the vicinity of an arsenal, while 87° *Gruppo* claimed one large ship hit and an oiler sunk in Lac de Bizerte. Although French anti-aircraft batteries hit four 193ª and three 258ª *Squadriglie* S.79s, all returned home. During the action poor weather separated MM21080/258-7, flown by Tenente Tomasino, from its section leader, MM22214/258-1 (Capitano Profumi). Tomasino landed at Catania at 0525 hrs, almost out of fuel.

An armourer tests a *Sparviero*'s 12.7 mm Breda-SAFAT dorsal machine gun in the summer of 1940 (*via author*)

That afternoon at 1455 hrs, off Corsica's Cape Sagro, five 255ª *Squadriglia* (105° *Gruppo*) S.79s led by Maggiore Remo Cadringher unsuccessfully chased a French submarine that weakly returned fire. After being attacked again by three 254ª *Squadriglia* trimotors led by Maggiore Cadringher in 254-1, the submarine took shelter in the port at Calvi.

On 23 June 3ª *Squadra Aerea* S.79s attacked French western front fortifications. Trimotors from 13ª and 63ª *Squadriglie* (9° *Stormo*), plus five from 252ª *Squadriglia* (104° *Gruppo*, 46° *Stormo*, led by Capitano Casini), bombed the forts at Roquebrune, Mont Ours and Cap Martin. Over the latter fortification, anti-aircraft splinters damaged three 252ª *Squadriglia* aircraft (252-1, 252-3 and 252-7). Earlier, whilst taking off at the start of this mission, 252ª *Squadriglia* S.79 252-8, flown by Tenente Aurelio, crashed, badly injuring four crewmen, including the pilot. One crewman subsequently died of his injuries the next day.

On 24 June the Franco-Italian War came to an end. That same day two 36° *Stormo* S.79s reconnoitred Tunisian airports without being attacked. In addition, Sottotenente Cimicchi of 50ª *Squadriglia* (38° *Gruppo*, 32° *Stormo*) flew his S.79 on a reconnaissance mission over Calvi harbour, as he recalled;

'I flew for four hours at an altitude of 4500 m. I had the Sardinian coast on my right and the open sea on my left. After passing the Bonifacio Strait I flew deep into Corsican territory. I was not shadowed by French fighters. Ack-ack followed me with a few bursts without causing damage. Perhaps France had surrendered.'

S.79s OVER THE BALKANS

Eager to 'repay' the *Führer*, whose forces had entered Rumania without warning him first, Mussolini responded with a similarly bold strategic move when he ordered the *Regio Esercito Italiano* to invade Greece via Albania on 28 October 1940. However, after a limited thrust into Hellenic territory,

The lateral gunner of an S.79 looks for possible enemies while flying over Greece. Some early *Sparvieri* had two drum-fed Lewis machine guns (*SME*)

a fierce Greek counteroffensive in November and December forced the Italians into a fighting retreat back onto Albanian soil. The Greeks aimed to hurl the Italians into the sea and conquer the port city of Valona. Although they made tactical gains, Greek troops failed to break the determined Italian resistance in the battles of Berat and Tepelene in January and February 1941.

In the skies overhead, the *Regia Aeronautica* enjoyed relative air superiority, fighting wild aerial battles with the RAF and the Hellenic Air Force. Between 9-14 March 1941, the Italians tried to break through the frontline, unleashing an offensive in the Deshnices Valley. Their attacks achieved little for appalling losses, although they wore down Greek troops in anticipation of a future offensive. This never took place, however, due to the Yugoslav military's pro-British coup on 26 March 1941. Accordingly, the Germans, already alarmed by the British presence in Greece, invaded both Greece and Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941. A now customary *Blitzkrieg* had overwhelmed Yugoslav resistance by 17 April, with British and Greek forces being all but defeated six days later. Axis air power now harried British troops as they attempted to flee the Greek mainland for Crete and, eventually, Egypt.

As far as the S.79's involvement on this hard-fought war front was concerned, just one unit, 46° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre* with its two subordinate-units, 104° and 105° *Gruppi*, bore the brunt of the *Sparvieri*'s air operations.

At 0835 hrs on 1 November 1940 ten S.79s of 105° *Gruppo* (five each from 254ª and 255ª *Squadriglie*) took off from Tirana to bomb Salonika, led by *gruppo* commander Tenente Colonnello Galeazzo Ciano in trimotor 254-2, co-piloted by Colonnello Giuseppe Casero. Escorted by CR.42s, the S.79s aimed for the port's dockyards and were intercepted by seven Greek PZL P.24 fighters of 22 *Mira* (fighter squadron) from Sedes airport. The Greek fighters stubbornly chased the bombers, damaging 254-8 (Sottotenente Giuseppe Marchiori) and three others from 255ª *Squadriglia* (pilots Maggiore Cadringher, Tenente Giannone and Sottotenente Alessandro Caselli). His fuel tanks hit, Caselli left the formation and returned to base at maximum speed. The S.79s also encountered intense anti-aircraft fire, which damaged trimotors 254-5 (Tenente Augusto Fusco) and 254-6 (future torpedo-bomber pilot Tenente Michele Avalle).

Atlantic flyer Maggiore Remo Cadringher flew many sorties in 105° *Gruppo* S.79s over France, Malta and the Balkans during 1940 (*via author*)

A total of 35 civilians were killed during the raid, and all of the S.79s landed back at base at 1130 hrs. In his diary, Tenente Colonnello Ciano wrote;

'The sun at last. I'm taking this opportunity to make a slap-up bombardment of Salonika. On the return route I am attacked by Greek fighters – all goes well and two of them are going down [the Greeks reported no losses, however]. But I confess it was the first time I had fighters on my tail – it's a really bad sensation.'

Thus, Count Ciano, who as Italian Foreign Affairs Minister was among those mainly responsible for the dramatic Italian adventure in Greece and was considered by many to be the 'bad genius' behind the invasion, found out what it was like to be chased by enemy fighters.

Ten other 105° *Gruppo* S.79s, comprising five from each squadron, led by Maggiore Cadringher and escorted by CR.42s, bombed Salonika again

at 1450 hrs the following day. As with the previous attack, the trimotors endured accurate anti-aircraft fire and interception by 22 *Mira* fighters. Two 255ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, flown by Tenente Giannone and Sottotenente Caselli, were struck by shell splinters, although they both made it back to Tirana at 1605 hrs. Two 254ª *Squadriglia* bombers, 254-4 (Sottotenente Oronzo Lorusso) and 254-5 (Tenente Umberto Aiello), were also damaged. Lorusso's aircraft, hit in multiple areas, was forced to land at Devoli at 1530 hrs with gunner 1° Aviere Armiere Giocondo Di Stasio dead. This raid inflicted a heavy toll on the civilian population of Salonika, with 200 being killed.

Twelve days later, on 14 November, three P.24s from Larissa-based 23 *Mira* intercepted a reconnaissance S.79 of 254ª *Squadriglia* between Koritza and Bilishte. The Greek fighters, led by Yposminagos (1Lt) G Laskaris, badly damaged the trimotor, which forced-landed at Koritza. Its pilot, Tenente Calogero Mazza, suffered an injured right leg when the bomber came down, whilst wireless operator Maresciallo Attilio Grassini was killed.

The next day five 105° *Gruppo* S.79s (one from 255ª *Squadriglia*), escorted by 24° *Gruppo Caccia* G.50s, bombed Greek positions in the Florina sector. The S.79s were intercepted by six P.24s from 22 *Mira*, the fighters inflicting varying amounts of damage on all of the trimotors. 254-2 (Sottotenente Oronzo Lorusso) was badly damaged, 254-5 (Tenente Umberto Aiello) and 254-10 (Sottotenente Ernesto Borrelli, another future torpedo-bomber pilot) received slight damage, while 254-9 was lost. This last aircraft, flown by Sottotenente Alberto Fabbri, was attacked by Sminias (Sgt) Panayotes Argyropoulos and crashed on Koritza airfield with its flight engineer, Maresciallo Ascanio Ascani, dead and gunner 1° Aviere Armiere Jaures Cossinovi badly wounded. No fewer than 106 bullet holes were counted in the *Sparviero*.

On 18 November two 255ª *Squadriglia* S.79s flown by Tenente Giulio Ricciarini (another future torpedo-bomber pilot) and Sottotenente Alessandro Caselli were in action over the Koritza area when they were intercepted by three P.24s from 23 *Mira* at 1120 hrs. The fighters' bursts slightly damaged Ricciarini's machine, but Caselli's MM22319 had its port wing badly damaged and set alight. Caselli struggled to coax his aircraft back over Italian-held territory, whereupon he ordered his crew to bail out. After they had taken to their parachutes it was Caselli's turn, but the trimotor's tailplane severed his parachute and the 20-year-old pilot plummeted to his death. Among the crew, both weighty co-pilot Sergente Maggiore Alberto Barbieri and bomb aimer Sergente Cesare Bonamico, whose parachute was partly burned, descended quite rapidly and suffered fractures and contusions. The remaining three crewmen escaped unharmed. For his heroism, Sottotenente Caselli was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*.

On 19 November there was a significant change, as RAF fighters made their lethal debut over the Albanian Front, and thenceforth air combats became tougher. Exactly one month later, on 19 December, 14 Gladiators of No 80 Sqn attacked five S.79s over the Tepelene region. Although both the 104° and 105° *Gruppi* war diaries did not report a single encounter with enemy fighters, the bombers' lethal return fire brought down Gladiator N5785, a badly wounded Plt Off Samuel Cooper taking to his parachute. Succumbing to his wounds that evening in Argyrokastron hospital, Cooper had been credited with two victories (one shared) in Albanian skies.

On 20 December 1940 Tenente Raul Torazzi, in *Sparviero* 253-1, survived a collision with a Gladiator from No 80 Sqn and then made it back to Tirana despite serious damage having been inflicted on his aircraft (*SME*)

The next day six 104° *Gruppo* S.79s (three each from 252ª and 253ª *Squadriglie*) were intercepted over the Tepelene-Kelcyre area by nine Gladiators from No 80 Sqn, the fighters being led by future ranking RAF ace Flt Lt 'Pat' Pattle. He hit trimotor 253-3, flown by Tenente Andrea Berlingieri, which returned fire but rapidly lost height and disappeared among the mountains, its crew subsequently being listed as missing. Two Gladiators were damaged, one after colliding violently with Tenente Raul Torazzi's 253-1, which had its lower fuselage and ventral gondola seriously damaged. Despite this, Torazzi made it back to Tirana. The second Gladiator to be damaged was hit by fire from Tenente Vivarelli's 253-2. Although his S.79 was struck on its fuselage and wings by machine gun bursts, Vivarelli made it back to Scutari. During this battle the unscathed trio of 252ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, led by Capitano Gabriele Casini's MM22593/252-3, claimed one Gladiator 'kill'.

The first action of note for the *Sparvieri* in the new year took place on 30 January, involving 46° *Stormo*. Five 254ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Tenente Colonnello Ciano (in 254-1, with Colonnello Casero as co-pilot), along with aircraft from 255ª *Squadriglia*, bombed the Caizza area. Ten days earlier 105° *Gruppo* had moved to Bari from Tirana, and it was from the Apulian base on 8 February that Ciano's 254-1 led a five-strong 254ª *Squadriglia* formation, accompanied by 255ª *Squadriglia* trimotors, in a raid on Kelcyre. Ciano's crew again included Colonnello Casero, Tenente Mancini and Capitano Pavolini.

At 1100 hrs the following day, five 104° *Gruppo* S.79s (four from 252ª *Squadriglia* and Sottotenente Simoni's 253-1) led by Capitano Gabriele Casini in MM22593/252-3 bombed Yanina airfield, also damaging the town's southern outskirts. The war diary of 253ª *Squadriglia* records that one trimotor, probably Simoni's, was slightly damaged by anti-aircraft fire.

Really 'explosive' Merry Christmas wishes from 253ª *Squadriglia* in December 1940! (*AM*)

At around 1500 hrs on 9 February, Tenente Colonnello Ciano's 254-1, again with Casero, Mancini and Pavolini on board, bombed the mall villages of Gur and Trec in company with eight 255ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Tenente Caramelli. These latter *Sparvieri* also bombed Greek positions near Kelcyre. The raiding S.79s, escorted by 12 24° *Gruppo* G.50s and 12 160° *Gruppo* CR.42s, were intercepted over the Kelcyre-Tepelene area by four 21 *Mira* Gladiators and eight P.24s of 22 and 23 *Mire*. The Italian fighters downed a Gladiator (1Lt Antonis Papaioannu was

wounded) and a P.24 (1Lt H Kotronis also slightly wounded) and damaged two other Gladiators flown by Sminagos (Capt) Ioannis Kellas and Episminias (Flt Sgt) Ilias Dimitrakopoulos and a 22 *Mira* P.24 flown by Sgt Ioannis Mihopoulos, who was wounded.

On 10 February five 104° *Gruppo* S.79s (one from 252ª and four from 253ª *Squadriglie*), led by Capitano Carbone in 253-1, raided Florina, igniting a fuel dump. Anti-aircraft fire damaged two S.79s, and the trimotors, including Sottotenente 'Ciccio' Di Bella's 253-3, were then engaged by three 21 *Mira* Gladiators. Escorting 154° *Gruppo* G.50s shot down the aircraft of 1Lt Anastassios Bardavilias, who was killed.

A *Sparviero* gunner at his combat station, manning his Breda-SAFAT 12.7 mm machine gun, inside a trimotor's ventral gondola. This weapon was an optional fit in the S.79 (*AM*)

That afternoon four 104° *Gruppo* S.79s, escorted by 12 154° *Gruppo* G.50s, bombed Katzika airfield south of Yanina. A solitary No 80 Sqn Gladiator flown by ace Flg Off R N 'Ape' Cullen attacked, badly damaging S.79 MM22010/252-2 flown by Tenente Francesco Caporotundo. The crippled *Sparviero* returned to base with three wounded crew on board. Italian raids on the Yanina area damaged three No 80 Sqn Gladiators on the ground and destroyed a 21 *Mira* Gladiator.

On 11 February Tenente Colonnello Ciano led five 254ª *Squadriglia* S.79s over Kelcyre again (254-1 being crewed as it was on 8 February). Noteworthy among that patrol's *Sparvieri* was Sottotenente Borrelli's 254-9, whose crew included the famous writer and journalist Capitano Curzio Malaparte of the *Regio Esercito* as an observer. The following day 105° *Gruppo* was fully committed to the defensive action being fought by the *Regio Esercito* during the Battle of Tepelenë, S.79s bombing Greek troops on Mount Trebeshinë's Hill 1308. Ciano's 254-1, with Casero and Mancini on board, led the way. Four days later 105° *Gruppo* targeted Hill 1308 for a second time, Ciano's 254-1 again leading, with the faithful Casero and Mancini on board. On 20 February three 254ª *Squadriglia* S.79s (supported by aircraft from 255ª *Squadriglia*) bombed Arza. Yet again, Casero and Mancini were on board Ciano's 254-1.

Three days later five 253ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Tenente Luigi Dettoni targeted Florina railway station, which was stoutly defended by anti-aircraft fire. All of the trimotors received varying degrees of damage, with *Sparviero* 253-4 (Tenente Maltinti) ditching into the partly frozen Lake Prespa, whereupon its crew were captured. Of the four remaining S.79s, only Tenente Taverna's 253-3 reached Tirana. Tenente Dettoni's 253-1, almost out of fuel, landed on Tortoreto airfield south of Porto d'Ascoli, while both 253-2 (Tenente Terlizzi) and 253-5 (Sottotenente Francesco Di Bella, a future torpedo-bomber *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* recipient) landed in then neutral Yugoslavia, the aircraft suffering damage and their crews being wounded.

At 1515 hrs on 28 February four Hawker Hurricanes of No 33 Sqn, led by Flt Lt A M Young, intercepted five 255ª *Squadriglia* S.79s that were bombing the village of Kuç, in Albania. Plt Off 'Bill' Winsland damaged Tenente Vincenzo Giannone's MM22590, which landed at Tirana with two

crew dead. Meanwhile, again over Kuç, Gladiators of Nos 80 and 112 Sqns engaged six 104° *Gruppo* S.79s led by Capitano Ernesto Carbone's 253-1 and escorted by 160° *Gruppo* CR.42s. High-scoring ace Plt Off Bill 'Cherry' Vale of No 80 Sqn claimed one bomber destroyed (the last of 12 kills credited to him in the Gladiator), but the Italians reported that Tenente Silvio Garrone's MM22184/252-9 was only slightly damaged by anti-aircraft fire.

On 9 March ten 105° *Gruppo* S.79s (three 255ª and seven 254ª *Squadriglie* aircraft, led by Tenente Colonnello Ciano in 254-1) were intercepted over Tepelene by 15 Gladiators of No 112 Sqn. A probable kill was claimed by future ace Plt Off Jack Groves, and 255ª *Squadriglia* reported that Tenente Vincenzo Giannone's S.79, MM22164, was damaged and a gunner badly wounded. The *Sparvieri*'s return fire brought down Gladiator N5823, Plt Off R H 'Mac' McDonald bailing out badly burned and later dying of his wounds, and damaged four more.

Four days later, four 253ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Gigi Dettoni in 253-1 targeted Allied troops on Mount Trebeshinë, and the bombers were engaged by 14 No 112 Sqn Gladiators and six No 33 Sqn Hurricanes – the RAF fighters were led by No 112 Sqn's CO, Sqn Ldr Harry Brown. No S.79s were lost, but one was badly damaged by anti-aircraft fire.

On 13 April Gladiators of No 112 Sqn, led by newly promoted Sqn Ldr 'Algy' Schwab (who was also an ace), clashed over Koritza with eight 104° *Gruppo* S.79s led by Tenente Colonnello Porta's 253-1 and escorted by Macchi C.200 fighters. Schwab claimed a Macchi destroyed, while the S.79s' gunners were credited with one Gladiator downed and a second as a probable. Only one biplane fighter had in fact been lost, Plt Off P C L Brunton being forced to bail out of his aircraft after it suffered propeller failure. Ten days later the Greek government signed an armistice with the invading Axis forces.

YUGOSLAV *SPARVIERI*

Another country to exploit the S.79's performance was the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which purchased 45 machines from Italy in 1938. The *Sparvieri* in service with the *Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplovstvo* (Royal Yugoslav Air Force) were posted to 7. *Vazduhoplovni Bombarderski Puk* (Air Bomber Regiment), made up of 66. and 67. *Grupa*, each 15 trimotors strong, and to 81. *Samolstalna Vazduhoplovna Bombarderska Grupa* (Independent Air Bomber Group), which had 14 S.79s and comprised 261. and 262. *Eskadrila*, led by Kapetan Sergije Frantov and Kapetan Raja Nedeljkovic, respectively.

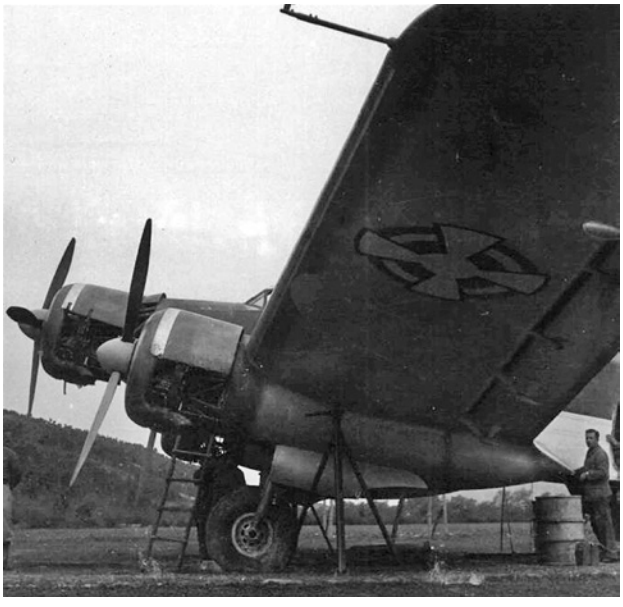
On 6 April 1941, the day of the Axis invasion of both northern Greece and Yugoslavia, 7. *Puk*, led by Potpukovnik (Lt Col) Hinko Dragic-Hauer, was based at Mostar as part of the 4. *Bombarderska Vazduhoplovna Brigada* (Bomber Air Brigade – HQ at Ljubic) led by Pukovnik (Col) Petar Vukcevic. Its 66. *Grupa* (Maj Dusan Sofilj) was based at Preljina, with sub-units 211. and 212. *Eskadrila* (led by Kapetan Kresimir Boras and Kapetan Aleksandar Dobanovacki, respectively) operating 13 S.79s between them. Before the outbreak of war three S.79s had been lost in accidents. The first had flown into a thick overcast and crashed into the Cabalja mountain near Livno-Konjic, killing all on board, the second had crashed near Podvelezje, also killing its crew, and the third had been lost owing to pilot error near the Neretva river, although its crew had been saved.

The wreck of a Yugoslav S.79 of 81. *Samostalna Grupa* on Mostar-Ortjies airfield, where it was destroyed during an Axis air raid in April 1941 (*via author*)

Upon receiving news of the invasion, 7. *Puk* S.79s flew tactical support missions for the Yugoslav Army as it attacked Italian positions along the Albanian border and in the Drin valley. Pukovnik Petar Vukcevic led 66. *Grupa* S.79s in an attack on Taraboshit airfield near Scutari, and against bridges and military encampments on the Drin and Buene rivers, disengaging unharmed. Similar targets were bombed by 81. *Samostalna Grupa*, based at Mostar-Ortjies, with one *eskadrila* also attacking Taraboshit airfield. On 7 April seven 81. *Grupa* S.79s attacked Durazzo and Tirana, after which Yugoslav coastal batteries at Boka Kotorska mistakenly fired at three of their own trimotors, shooting one of them down. The poor conditions at Prjielina airfield forced 66. *Grupa* S.79s to remain grounded, leaving 67. *Grupa* to attack frontline targets alone – one of its crews claimed an Italian Fiat fighter shot down. The next day 81. *Grupa* S.79s bombed Italian defences at Zara (Zadar) as a prelude to an assault by the Yugoslav Army's *Jadranska* Division.

On 9 April poor weather grounded 7. *Puk* aircraft, but along the southwestern Yugoslav-Albanian front the Italians counterattacked. In response, at 1100 hrs, 81. *Grupa* struck the port of Zara, killing two, wounding fifteen and destroying Valdibora ammunition dump. A Croat Ustashi uprising the following day at Mostar-Ortjies caused havoc and the situation deteriorated rapidly, demoralising 81. *Grupa* aircrew. A 211. *Eskadrila* S.79, flown by Porucnik (1Lt) Branko Prodanovic, took off for the Soviet Union shortly thereafter but crashed near Mamaja, killing all but one of those on board. As the Germans approached Kraljevo on 11 April, 66. *Grupa* crews either set fire to their trimotors or flew them out. Altogether, 12 7. *Puk* S.79s led by Kapetan Jefta Bosnjak assembled at Mostar, where crews decided to follow 81. *Grupa*'s example, escaping either to the USSR or to Niksic, in Montenegro. As no spares were available, non-airworthy S.79s had their tyres slashed. The four serviceable aircraft from each unit took off for the Soviet Union that same day. However, only half of them would make it.

Porucnik (1Lt) Milos Jelic's aircraft, with seven on board, landed at Kisinev, Porucnik Hinko Soic's S.79, carrying five passengers landed at Staraya Farmosika, Porucnik Uros Djeric's machine, with four passengers landed at Savat and Porucnik Zivko Milojkovic made it to Prvomayskaya. Among the others to get airborne, 214. *Eskadrila*'s CO, Kapetan Jefta Bosnjak, whose aircraft was overloaded with ten men, crashed into mountains after a 40 km flight, and Sgt Branko Tomic, whose machine was also heavily laden, crashed into Mount Igman, near Sarajevo. There were no survivors from either S.79. A third trimotor came down in Hungarian Transylvania, its crew being interned. Late in 1942 the Hungarians exchanged this trimotor with the Italians for two CR.42s. The fate of the fourth *Sparviero* is unknown.



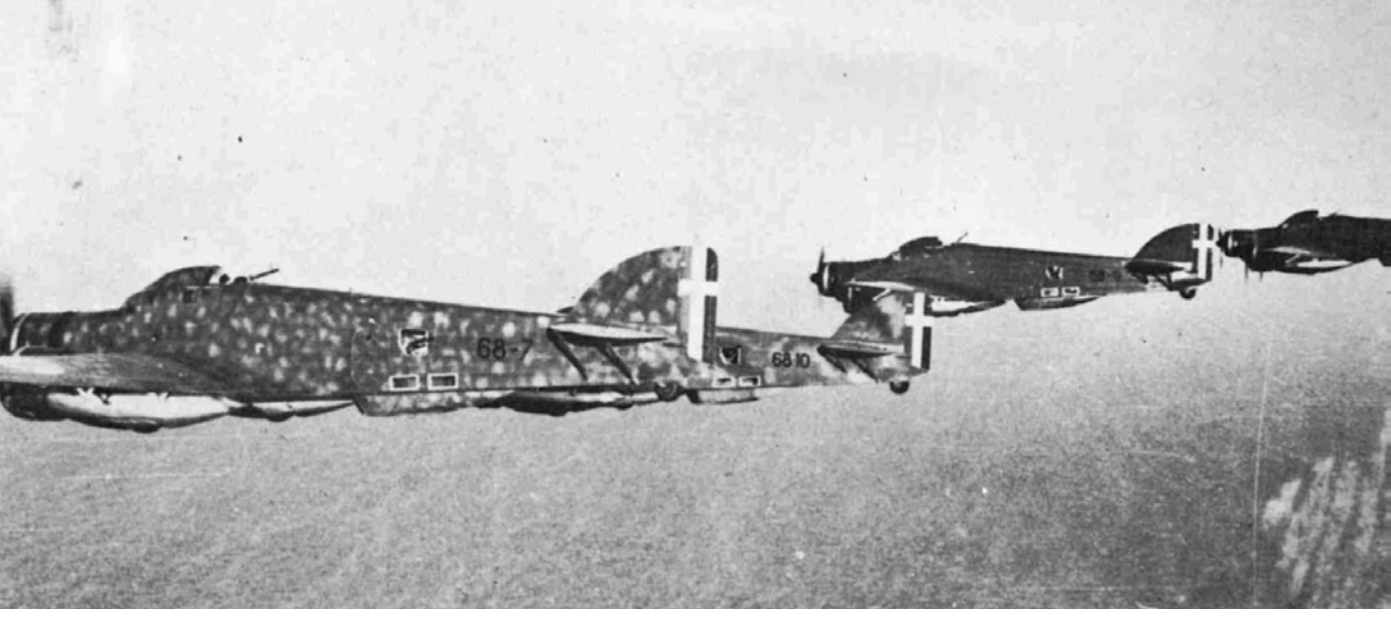
A former Yugoslav S.79 retrieved by the Italians is overhauled by groundcrew from the *Regia Aeronautica* (*courtesy ItAF Historical Service*)

Meanwhile, eight other S.79s, four each from 81. *Grupa* and 7. *Puk*, had landed safely at Niksic, where their crews prepared to head for Greece. At 1530 hrs on 12 April two *Schwärme* of Luftwaffe Messerschmitt Bf 110s strafed Bjeljina airfield, destroying several aircraft on the ground, including a 7. *Puk* S.79.

Two days later seven or eight S.79s were still at Niksic, along with Yugoslav King Peter II, when four Italian *Sparvieri* bombed the town. Shortly thereafter the 18-year-old monarch set off for Greece on board S.79 No 3728 'White 12' of 7. *Puk*, flown by Maj Dusan Sofilj, CO of 66. *Grupa*. Whilst flying along the Adriatic coast Greek anti-aircraft batteries opened up on the 'Royal' S.79, whereupon the crew shot off flares, prompting Gladiators of No 112 Sqn to intercept the bomber and escort both it and an accompanying 209. *Eskadrila* Dornier Do 17K to Paramythia. After landing, the young king and his prime minister were greeted by a guard of honour made up of No 211 Sqn airmen – the monarch was suitably impressed by his welcome. Later that same evening the king's S.79 set off for Menidi, escorted by Bristol Blenheims of No 211 Sqn. The young monarch subsequently reached the United Kingdom from Egypt. The ultimate fate of S.79 'White 12' is not known.

Other escaping S.79s flew to Paramythia, where at least 44 Yugoslav aircraft of several types were assembling. At dawn on 15 April C.200s of 22° *Gruppo Caccia* strafed the airfield, claiming six bombers and one fighter destroyed, plus ten other aircraft destroyed. One Yugoslav airman was killed during the attack. Later that same morning nine 24° *Gruppo Caccia* G.50s, with another 15 providing top cover, strafed Yanina airfield, destroying a Yugoslav S.79. At 1400 hrs four Yugoslav S.79s and four Do 17Ks landed at Paramythia, where No 211 Sqn's Medical Officer, Flt Lt W P Griffin, told their crews to fly on to Agrinion. All of the S.79s and two Dorniers promptly took off, but the two Do 17Ks that remained were destroyed on the ground some minutes later by 40 strafing German Messerschmitt Bf 109Es.

The S.79s' escape from Greece continued on 19 April, when three 81. *Grupa* trimotors (Nos 3712 to 3714) were among the Yugoslav aircraft that left Eleusis and Menidi for Egypt and soon reached Heliopolis, followed shortly thereafter by a fourth trimotor (No 3702). All of the former 81. *Grupa* S.79s were later incorporated into the RAF's No 117 Sqn at Khartoum in the spring of 1941 (from 30 April according to some sources), these aircraft receiving RAF serials, including AX702 (No 3712, some sources reporting this machine to have been with No 117 Sqn from 26 May 1941) and AX703 (No 3713). The RAF serial allocated to No 3714 is unknown, as is its final fate. AX703 subsquently crashed at Takoradi on 17 November 1941 owing to engine failure. No 3702, reserialled AX705, briefly served with No 2 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit at Heliopolis from 3 January 1942 until it was damaged in a landing accident on 27 February 1942 and struck off charge.



CHAPTER FOUR

WAR OVER THE MEDITERRANEAN

On 10 June 1940, when Italy declared war on both Britain and France, Sicily-based 2ª *Squadra Aerea*, later renamed *Aeronautica della Sicilia*, comprised 11°, 30°, 34°, 36° and 41° *Stormi*, all equipped with S.79s. This force's primary task was to strike Maltese targets. At 0435 hrs on 11 June ten 34° *Stormo* S.79s led by Colonnello Umberto Mazzini left Catania to raid Hal Far airport, followed at 0450 hrs by 15 11° Stormo *Sparvieri* led by Colonnello Arnaldo Lubelli, these aircraft targeting Valetta dockyards. Finally, at 0500 hrs, ten 41° Stormo S.79s under Colonnello Enrico Pezzi departed from Gela for Kalafrana seaplane base. All of these trimotors were protected by 18 6° *Gruppo* C.200s led by Colonnello Armando Francois.

Over the island the 34° *Stormo* S.79s were intercepted by three Hal Far Fighter Flight Gladiators. Future ace Flt Lt George Burges in Gladiator N5531 damaged a 214ª *Squadriglia* (52° *Gruppo*) S.79 piloted by Capitano Rosario Di Blasi, whose dorsal gunner, 1° Aviere Armiere Francesco Ferrara, quickly returned fire. Bombs from 11° *Stormo* S.79s destroyed a Royal Malta Artillery post at Fort St Elmo, killing six soldiers and disabling a gun.

At 0925 hrs a single 215ª *Squadriglia* (52° *Gruppo*, 34° *Stormo*) S.79 flown by Tenente Vittorio Stancanelli took off to verify the results of the raids, but

Four 34° *Gruppo* S.79s in flight, this photograph probably having been taken on 28 June 1940 when 68ª *Squadriglia* moved from Comiso to Gadoura in Rhodes. The first three trimotors are, in order, MM21412 68-7 (Sottotenente Mario Massera), MM22292 68-10 (Capitano Cesare Ciochino, the unit's CO) and MM22142 68-9 (Tenente Francesco Pepe) (*AM*)

at around midday whilst directly over Malta it was driven off by future ace Flg Off John Waters in Gladiator N5520.

At about 1740 hrs 15 11° and ten 41° *Stormi* S.79s bombed Valetta dockyard again, eight 34° *Stormo* aircraft returned to attack Hal Far and five 36° *Stormo* trimotors targeted Valetta Grand Harbour. This last S.79 operation of the day was led by 259ª *Squadriglia*'s Capitano Mazzotti, with co-pilot Tenente Franco Cappa (a future *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* recipient). Mazzotti was at the controls of MM22214/258-1, which was equipped with a direction finder. Anti-aircraft fire struck six 34° *Stormo* S.79s, one from 11° *Stormo* (injuring 60ª *Squadriglia* bomb aimer Sottotenente Elvio Magrì) and one from 41° *Stormo*. The 36° *Stormo* patrol reported four attacking Gladiators that struck S.79s MM21143/258-6 (Tenente Pietro Benato) and MM21125/259-4 (Tenente Carlo Favetta), which was also hit by splinters from exploding anti-aircraft shells. Italian gunners claimed one Gladiator probably shot down. Many Maltese civilians were killed and wounded during these first Italian air raids of the war.

Two days later a solitary 60ª *Squadriglia* S.79 (33° *Gruppo*, 11° *Stormo*) left Comiso at 1720 hrs and was intercepted over Malta by Gladiator N5520 flown by Flg Off Waters, although the Italian bomber slipped away after jettisoning its bombs.

On 14 June six 214ª *Squadriglia* S.79s were despatched to bomb Malta's Burmola arsenal. Three trimotors aborted the mission, with one of them, MM21833 flown by Tenente Poliuto Biccolini, crashing near Lentini with the loss of its crew. The S.79 flown by Capitano Di Blasi recovered after icing caused it to lose altitude, but two panicking crewmen bailed out, descending near Lentini. The following day 68ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM22292/68-10 (Capitano Cesare Ciochino) was attacked over Hal Far by three Gladiators, Flg Off Peter Hartley claiming it as damaged. The Italians, however, recorded that the bomber had been hit by anti-aircraft fire.

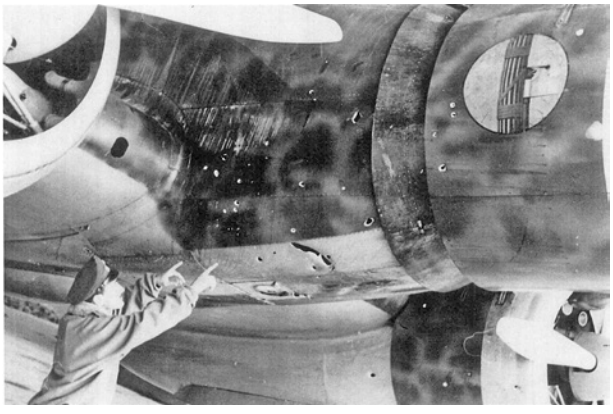
On 16 June ten 11° *Stormo* S.79s again targeted Hal Far, and they were intercepted by three Gladiators that damaged four trimotors from 68ª *Squadriglia* (34° *Gruppo*) and one from 59ª *Squadriglia* (33° *Gruppo*). No claims were officially reported by the attacking RAF pilots on this occasion, though possible scorers could be either Flg Off Hartley or Flt Lt Burges. Aerial battles continued the following day when Flg Off Waters' Gladiator, N5519, was damaged by return fire from three 217ª *Squadriglia* S.79s. Shell splinters in turn damaged one of the trimotors. That same day 11° *Stormo* S.79s scored the *Regia Aeronautica*'s first ship 'kill' of the war when they damaged the destroyer HMS *Diamond* off Malta.

A 36° *Stormo* companion (left) welcomes Tenente Franco Cappa (also left, in flying gear) after landing at Castelvetrano on 11 June 1940 following the first sortie over Malta. In this action Capitano Mazzotti of 259ª *Squadriglia*, with Tenente Cappa as his co-pilot, flew trimotor 258-1 because it was fitted with a direction finder (*via author*)

S.79s began targeting Malta at night from 20/21 June, six 34° Stormo aircraft and a seventh machine from 3ª *Divisione Aerea 'Centauro's' Reparto Volo*, led by *Generale di Divisione Aerea* Ettore Lodi, bombing for four hours. They succeeded in destroying Admiralty Floating Dock 5 (capable of servicing vessels up to 31,500 tons in weight) in Grand Harbour.

The first S.79 loss over Malta was reported on 22 June when, at 1600 hrs, MM22068 of 216ª *Squadriglia*, which was being flown on a

reconnaissance mission by Tenente Francesco Solimena, was shot down off Kalafrana by Flt Lt George Burges in Gladiator N5519. Two of the six crew survived. The next day ten 33° *Gruppo* S.79s led by Colonnello Lubelli carried out a raid on Malta, Generale Gennaro Tedeschini-Lalli, AOC 2ª *Squadra Aerea*, personally flying a 60ª *Squadriglia* trimotor. Seven of the *Sparvieri* were hit by accurate anti-aircraft fire.



An airman points out shell splinter holes in the forward fuselage of his S.79. Malta's anti-aircraft batteries left their mark on raiding S.79s from the very first day of their attacks (*Italian Army/SME*)

On 26 June 25 S.79s from 11°, 34° and 41° *Stormi* bombed Hal Far and Valletta. Tragically, in the Marsa area, an incendiary bomb started a blaze that killed 30 civilians. Two days later future ace Flg Off Bill 'Timber' Woods intercepted two 33° *Gruppo* S.79s, damaging 59ª *Squadriglia* trimotor MM22067 (Sottotenente Domenico Baldrati). Four aircrew were wounded, while flight engineer 1° Aviere Motorista Angelo Alvisi, confused by fumes from a holed fuel tank, bailed out. He was listed as missing in action.

On 3 July two 36° *Stormo* S.79s (one each from 256ª and 259ª *Squadriglie*) reconnoitring over Malta, escorted by nine 9° *Gruppo* (4° *Stormo Caccia*) CR.42s, were attacked by Hurricane P2614 flown by Flg Off John Waters, who shot down trimotor MM22065/259-5 off Kalafrana. Pilot Tenente Mario Sguario and six crew bailed out but were never found. The Hurricane was counterattacked by a CR.42 flown by legendary one-legged Spanish war veteran Maggiore Ernesto Botto, CO of 9° *Gruppo*. Botto's bursts badly damaged the Hurricane, and it was written off in the subsequent crash-landing. This was the first confirmed aerial victory credited to the *Regia Aeronautica* over Malta.

At 2100 hrs on 5 July nine 830 NAS Fairey Swordfish raided Catania airport, damaging 214ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM21834. Two days later ten 41° *Stormo* S.79s, escorted by nine 9° *Gruppo* CR.42s, attacked Malta dockyards. Two Royal Navy ratings were killed and six others wounded, and six Maltese civilians also died. Hal Far Fighter Flight aircraft scrambled, and Flg Off 'Timber' Woods in Hurricane P2653 shot down a 233ª *Squadriglia* (59° *Gruppo*, 41° *Stormo*) S.79 flown by Tenente Pellegrino Zagnoli.

Aircrew from 30° *Stormo* have an informal briefing at Comiso before heading off to bomb Malta in the summer of 1940 (*AM*)

During the afternoon of 9 July Sicilian-based S.79s from 11°, 30°, 34°, 36° and 41° *Stormi* repeatedly attacked British warships during the Battle of Calabria/Punta Stilo. In the heat of the action some S.79s mistakenly bombed warships of the *Regia Marina*, and this mistake later became known as the 'Italo-Italian Punta Stilo battle'. The exasperated Italian naval gunners, angered at being attacked by their own bombers, opened up, shooting down 257ª *Squadriglia* (108° *Gruppo*, 36° *Stormo*) S.79 257-3 flown by Sottotenente Luigi Ruggeri.

A striking close-up of 192ª *Squadriglia* (87° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo*) S.79 192-2, flown on six sorties against Malta in July-August 1940 by Capitano Emilio Verrascina (*AM*)

In respect to the S.79's performance as a high-altitude ship hunter, the following report by Sottotenente Cimicchi is quite illuminating;

'The poor effectiveness of our naval bombing revealed itself after the first actions against the British ships. Early in the war it was firmly believed that our aircraft would inflict severe damage on the enemy fleet. And I believed that the English feared such a possibility. The care they displayed regarding their movements confirmed this. We were mathematically convinced of the possibility to sink ships using classic bombing tactics. Later, the facts proved the opposite. Many factors made it difficult to strike the target. First of all the targets' speed, then the lack of an aiming device that would assure certain precision and, finally, the bomb's poor destructive effect.'

That same morning over Malta two Hal Far Fighter Flight Hurricanes flown by Flt Lt George Burges and Flg Off Jock Barber intercepted S.79 194-4 of 30° *Stormo*'s 90° *Gruppo*, flown by Capitano Valerio Scarabellotto of 192ª *Squadriglia* (87° *Gruppo*), during a reconnaissance mission. Although the trimotor was escorted by four 9° *Gruppo* CR.42s, Burges, in Hurricane P2645, succeeded in badly damaging the trimotor and mortally wounding both Scarabellotto and a gunner. The crippled bomber was skilfully nursed home by co-pilot Tenente Pietro Donà delle Rose (a future torpedo-bomber *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* recipient), who made a belly-landing at Comiso. Burges' Hurricane was slightly damaged while tangling with the CR.42 escorts. In recognition of the dying Capitano Scarabellotto continuing to lead his crew prior to his death, he too was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*. For his bravery, Tenente Donà delle Rose received the *Medaglia d'Argento al Valor Militare* on 10 August.

On 10 July three Hal Far Fighter Flight Hurricanes intercepted 15 30° *Stormo* S.79s over Malta, destroying two of them. One was MM21632/195-6 of 90° *Gruppo*, its pilot, Sottotenente Felice Filippi, perishing with his crew when the aircraft, shot down over Grand Harbour by future ace Flg Off F F 'Eric' Taylor in P2645, crashed in flames near Fort Leonardo. Three soldiers of the 1st Battalion Dorsets who rushed to the spot were badly burned when the bomber exploded, and two later died. The second bomber to be lost, downed by Flg Off Woods in P2653, was 192-3 of 87° *Gruppo*, flown by Sottotenente Luigi Illica Magnani, who was killed along with his crew. A third Savoia, MM21298/194-7, flown by Tenente Terzo Mazzotti, was damaged beyond repair by bursts from Flg Off Peter Hartley's Hurricane, P2623, and it forced-landed at Comiso with a wounded gunner on board. The

30° *Stormo* trimotors had bombed Zabbar, Tarxien, the dockyard and Manoel Island's submarine base. Two servicemen were slightly injured, a civilian was killed and three others wounded during the raid.

The following day S.79s from Sicily's 30°, 34°, 36° and 41° *Stormi* harassed Mediterranean Fleet warships. Bomb splinters from 36° and 41° *Stormi Sparvieri* attacking Convoy MS 1 struck the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) destroyer HMAS *Vampire*, fatally wounding Commissioned Gunner John Endicott (the RAN's first war casualty). Sea Gladiators from HMS *Eagle* intercepted 90° *Gruppo*'s 194ª *Squadriglia*, and future ace Cdr Charles Keighly-Peach shot down Sottotenente Ciro Floreani's MM21295/194-8. Return fire from the latter aircraft also struck the Sea Gladiator, wounding Keighly-Peach. The S.79's crew were listed as missing. Lt Lloyd Keith of 815 NAS damaged Tenente Vincenzo Guidi's MM22069/194-3.

A 235ª *Squadriglia* (60° *Gruppo*, 41° *Stormo*) S.79 sheltered among olive trees at Gela airfield in July 1940. Note the 250 kg bombs in the foreground that have also been camouflaged with foliage (*via author*)

On 13 July six S.79s of 36° *Stormo*'s 256ª *Squadriglia* raided Malta by night, encountering fierce anti-aircraft fire. Two bombers were damaged and a third, flown by Tenente Pietro Ferri, was shot down. Malta's anti-aircraft batteries struck again on the 21st too, damaging 34° *Stormo* S.79 MM21931 flown by Tenente Giuseppe Canè, which ditched short of the Sicilian coast. All of its crew were recovered.

During the night of 12/13 August Malta's British nightfighters struck S.79 MM21439/259-6 flown by Tenente Poggi of 109° *Gruppo*, which ditched off the Sicilian coast – two airmen were drowned. On 15 August CR.42 escorts of 23° *Gruppo* repelled No 261 Sqn fighters (which comprised the combined Hal Far Fighter Flights, equipped with Gladiators and Hurricanes) that were attacking ten 60° *Gruppo* (41° *Stormo*) trimotors over Maltese targets.

Malta's airfields were bombed on 20 August by six S.79s from 105° *Gruppo*, three each from 254ª and 255ª *Squadriglie*. The 254ª *Squadriglia* trimotors were 254-2 (Maggiore Remo Cadringher), 254-6 (Capitano Aldo Vitali) and 254-3 (Tenente Michele Avalle), while the three 255ª *Squadriglia* machines were flown by Capitano Carlo Susinno (Capitano Giulio Ricciarini as co-pilot), Tenente Vincenzo Caramelli and Sottotenente Silvio Angelucci. The bombers were escorted by 16 23° *Gruppo* CR.42s, the Italian formation being inconclusively intercepted by four Hurricanes of No 261 Sqn. Bombs rained down, hitting two Fleet Air Arm Swordfish and three Blenheims (the latter in transit for Egypt, with one being burnt out). Four days later the same targets were bombed by 192ª and 193ª *Squadriglie* (30° *Stormo*) trimotors.

On 2 September seven 41° *Stormo* S.79s attacked the carrier HMS *Illustrious*, which was in turn strongly defended by its 806 NAS Fairey Fulmars – the latter were making their Mediterranean war debut. At 1450 hrs future ace Lt Bill Barnes shot down an S.79 and damaged another, and on board a third trimotor a crewman was fatally wounded. But 41° *Stormo* did not give up, and at 1915 hrs it mounted a second attack with six S.79s, of which two from 235ª *Squadriglia* (60° *Gruppo*) were lost to Fulmars. Among 806 NAS's claimants was future ace Sub-Lt 'Jackie' Sewell, who accounted for both of the *Sparvieri*. However, Sewell also experienced the S.79's strong

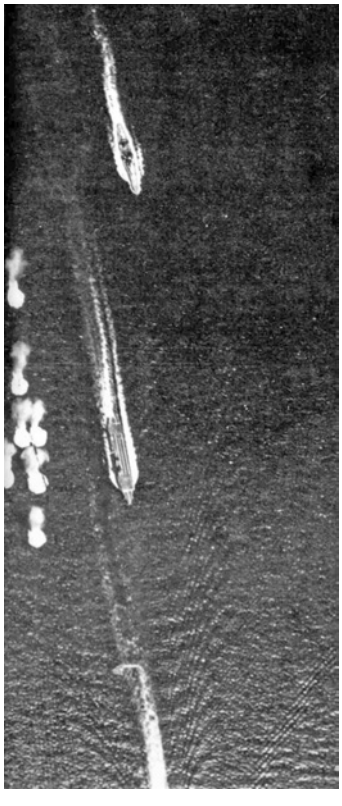
On 7 September 1940 Hurricanes of No 261 Sqn damaged two 36° *Stormo* S.79s over Malta. One of these trimotors was MM22214 258-1, flown by future *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* recipient Tenente Bartolomeo Tomasino, in which two airmen were wounded (*AM*)

return fire, which badly damaged his Fulmar and wounded Leading Airman Denis Tribe, but Lt Barnes guided his fellow pilot safely back to Malta.

On 7 September ten 36° *Stormo* S.79s bombed Valetta, damaging the submarine HMS *Olympus* (hit by a 258ª *Squadriglia* aircraft), the Admiralty tug *Hellespont* and sinking the dockyard captain's picket boat. However, three No 261 Sqn Hurricanes jointly damaged two 258ª *Squadriglia* (109° *Gruppo*) trimotors. These were MM22214/258-1, flown by Tenente Bartolomeo Tomasino, which returned with two wounded on board (one mortally), and MM21446/258-5, flown by Tenente Camillo Marzocco (two wounded crewmen). A week later, on 14 September, 34° *Stormo* Savoias bombed Kalafrana and Valetta. On 17 September Maggiore Cadringher's S.79 254-1 had its port wing hit by an anti-aircraft shell splinter while reconnoitring Hal Far and Luqa airfields.

After dark on 8 October Kalafrana and Marsa Scirocco were raided by five 36° *Stormo* S.79s, which were intercepted by a Hurricane nightfighter flown by Flg Off 'Eric' Taylor. He shot down S.79 257-6 (Tenente Adolfo Ferrari and his crew perished) and damaged trimotor 257-9 (Capitano Turba), which returned with two wounded on board.

The carrier HMS *Eagle* is bombed by 108° *Gruppo Sparvieri* on 12 October 1940, ordnance falling away from the S.79 that took this remarkable photograph being visible on the left side of the shot. In this action the carrier suffered shock damage that prevented its participation in the Taranto raid the following month (*via author*)



On 12 October 12 34° and ten 36° *Stormi* S.79s targeted Malta-bound Convoy MB 6 southeast of Cape Passero. The 108° *Gruppo* S.79s claimed a carrier hit, but *Eagle* actually survived 12 near-misses and some shockwave damage (which prevented its participation in the Taranto raid). Fulmars of 806 NAS from HMS *Illustrious* intercepted the attackers, who also reported Gladiator attacks as well. Fulmars shot down Tenente Alberto Soldati's 257-4 S.79 (108° *Gruppo*) in flames, and 11 34° *Stormo* trimotors were damaged by anti-aircraft fire.

Fighters also struck Tenente Casadio's 257-7, breaking gunner 1° Aviere Armiere Ignazio Zanini's arm. Although badly wounded, Zanini returned fire until a second burst killed him and wounded two other airmen. His courage earned him a posthumous *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*. The carrier fighters' bursts fatally struck both Tenente Giorgio Pieri's MM21080/258-7 and Tenente Franco Tempra's 259-2, both 109° *Gruppo* trimotors subsequently crashing in Sicily with no survivors. This bloody action also saw 806 NAS's Lt Nicolls, in Fulmar N1876, riddle a bomber with bullets, while future aces Lt Cdr Charles Evans and Sub-Lts Graham Hogg and Ivan Lowe shared two *Sparvieri* kills.

On 2 November 20 34° *Stormo* S.79s raided Luqa and Burmola, anti-aircraft fire damaging two bombers. Six days later six 34° *Stormo* trimotors, led by Col Umberto Mazzini, were targeting *Illustrious* when they were attacked by 806 NAS Fulmars, Lt Cdr Evans with Sub-Lts Hogg and Lowe damaging three S.79s. Six airmen were injured.

On the night of 18/19 December Hurricane P3731/'J' of No 261 Sqn, flown by future ace Sgt Fred Robertson, intercepted two 30° *Stormo* intruders over Malta, shooting down 193ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM22335 flown by Tenente Giulio Molteni, killing all of its crew. Hurricanes of No 261 Sqn damaged a reconnoitring S.79 on 25 January 1941, then badly damaged another Savoia from 193ª *Squadriglia* on a reconnaissance mission three days later.

At 1140 hrs on 1 February, a reconnaissance S.79 from 193ª *Squadriglia*, flown by unit CO Tenente Mario Cesari and escorted by four 156° *Gruppo* CR.42s, was attacked by Hurricanes of No 261 Sqn. Despite Sgt Robertson

scoring 150 hits on the trimotor, it escaped after the CR.42s' intervention. With two wounded on board, Tenente Cesari nursed his crippled *Sparviero* back to Comiso, landing at 1340 hrs. On 20 April three 87° *Gruppo* S.79s bombed Valetta arsenal, their escort fighters tangling with No 261 Sqn's Hurricanes. The next day a new S.79 unit reached Sicily in the form of 10° *Stormo*, led by Colonnello Ranieri Cupini and based at Chinisia, with its 30° *Gruppo* flying from Sciacca. Eight days later, the arrival of 32° *Gruppo* at Chinisia took the *Stormo* up to full operational strength.

At dawn on 28 April two 192ª *Squadriglia* S.79s flown by Tenente Colonnello Mario Giuliano and Tenente Mario Cesari (who had been the unit's CO since 9 April) attacked Malta's fortifications in the Marfa area at low level, leaving several targets burning. Two days later six 192ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Tenente Mario Cesari, and a similar number from 193ª *Squadriglia* (both from 87° *Gruppo*), escorted by 27 1° *Stormo* C.200s, raided Valetta arsenal again. All of the trimotors were damaged by anti-aircraft fire, but No 261 Sqn's Hurricanes failed to intercept them on this occasion.

On 15 May 32° *Gruppo* S.79 MM22586 was shot down over Malta by ace Plt Off John Pain of No 261 Sqn in Hurricane Z4060, this being the unit's last victory in defence of the island – he actually claimed a He 111 destroyed. Another 32° *Gruppo* S.79, MM21801, flown by Tenente Colonnello Marcucci, ran out of fuel while searching for the missing trimotor and ditched. Its crew was rescued by the hospital ship *Epomeo*.

On 3 June Sqn Ldr 'Butch' Barton, Battle of Britain ace and CO of recently arrived No 249 Sqn, flying Hurricane Z4043, shot down an S.79 of 56ª *Squadriglia* (30° *Gruppo*, 10° *Stormo*) flown by Tenente Franco Miscione. All of its crew perished. Barton had scored No 249 Sqn's first Malta victory. Six days later, four No 249 Sqn Hurricanes intercepted eight 30° *Stormo* S.79s off Malta, shooting down Tenente Marcello Weber's MM21852 and damaging three more trimotors, one of which was flown by Capitano Eugenio Falconi of 193ª *Squadriglia*. A Maltese rescue launch saved the

A mixed 87° *Gruppo* patrol made up of both 192ª and 193ª *Squadriglie* S.79s. Note that trimotors 193-6 and 193-8 display different camouflage patterns and variations of the 'electric man' unit emblem (*AM*)

wounded Weber and co-pilot Maresciallo Luciano Fabbri, and also Sgt Dennis Rex of No 249 Sqn, who had bailed out of Z4087 following a mechanical failure shortly after he had claimed an S.79 victory.

On 11 June four No 46 Sqn Hurricanes (of seven scrambled) downed 194ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM22129 whilst it was on a reconnaissance mission, killing Tenente Giorgio Pozzolini and his crew, despite its 17-strong C.200 escort from 54° *Stormo*'s 7° *Gruppo*. The Macchi pilots immediately avenged this loss, however, by shooting down Hurricane Z2480 flown by Flt Lt Norman Burnett, who was posted as missing. The following day 18 Hurricanes (nine each from Nos 46 and 249 Sqns) scrambled to intercept another reconnaissance S.79 of 57ª *Squadriglia* (32° *Gruppo*, 10° *Stormo*) flown by Capitano Castiglioni, which had had its central engine stopped by a shell splinter. The crippled trimotor was saved by its strong escort of 7° and 17° *Gruppi* C.200s. Although a 17° *Gruppo* fighter was indeed lost and a second Macchi damaged, they in turn shot down two No 249 Sqn Hurricanes and damaged a third.

On 23 June the customary reconnaissance mission over Malta was personally flown by 10° *Stormo* CO Colonnello Ranieri Cupini, whose S.79 was strongly escorted by C.200s.

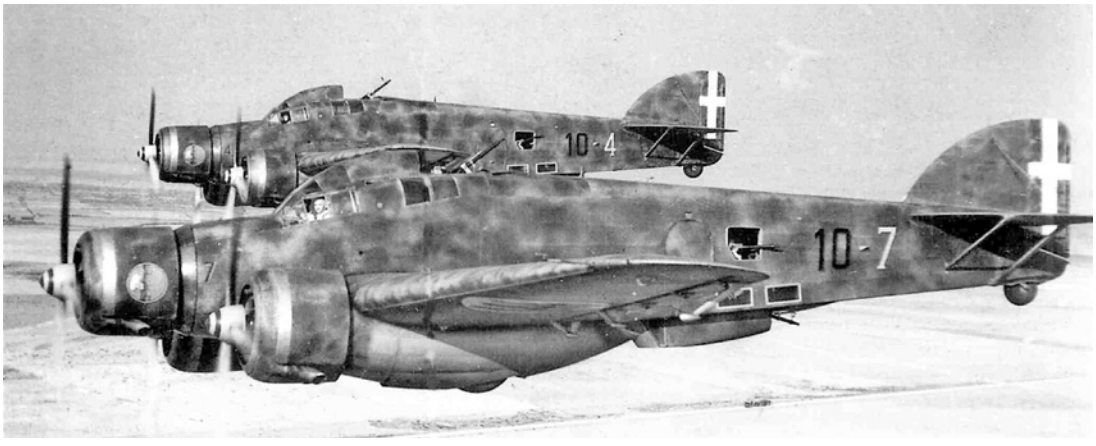
On the night of 8/9 July six 10° *Stormo* S.79s targeting Malta were intercepted by No 249 Sqn nightfighters. Flg Off Ernest Cassidy shot down 56ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM22594 (he erroneously claimed a Fiat BR.20 destroyed), killing Tenente Vincenzo Petti and crew, while a Vickers Wellington was destroyed on the ground during the raid.

During the night of 16/17 July, 10° *Stormo* lost S.79 MM23897 over Malta, Tenente Mario Massini and his crew perishing. Ten days later, on 27 July, Hurricanes of No 185 Sqn destroyed two S.79s of 56ª *Squadriglia* (30° *Gruppo*, 10° *Stormo*). On board one of the downed trimotors was 30° *Gruppo* CO Tenente Colonnello Roberto Liberi, who was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*.

Becoming increasingly vulnerable to RAF fighters during daylight operations over Malta, S.79 units switched almost exclusively to night reconnaissance and occasional bombing missions from mid-July 1941. Clashes between the trimotors and Hurricanes dropped off dramatically as a result.

SARDINIAN *SPARVIERI*

Although the vast majority of the *Regia Aeronautica*'s S.79 bomber force was involved in operations against Malta for the first year of the war in the Mediterranean, a handful of units flying from Sardinia were tasked with targeting Allied warships and merchant vessels. The first such attack took place on 9 July 1940 when 46 S.79s from 8° and 32° *Stormi*, led by Generale Stefano Cagna, bombed Force 'H' warships off the Balearic Islands. They were duly intercepted by 803 NAS Blackburn Skuas, led by Lt Donald Gibson, from HMS *Ark Royal*, the naval aircraft firing on two 49ª *Squadriglia* S.79s. PO Alf Theobald, with Naval Airman 'Freddy' De Frias, shot down MM21421/49-4 flown by Tenente Fredducci, while Lt Gibson and PO Gardner badly damaged MM21422/49-2, flown by Tenente Maccioni, which was forced-landed on Minorca Island in the Balearics. Sottotenente Cimicchi of 50ª *Squadriglia* described his role in this action;



Sardinian-based 8° and 32° *Stormi* engaged Force 'H' in many hard-fought actions, with these two 10ª *Squadriglia* (28° *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo*) S.79s, coded 10-4 and 10-7, being involved in a number of attacks on warships of the Royal Navy. The *Sparvieri* were photographed in August 1940 (*AM*)

'I duly dropped my five 250 kg bombs and at once made for base. Things were not so easy for the other aircraft of the Brigade. Two fell stricken into the sea. Two others [actually one] landed at Mallorca owing to breakdowns due to hits received. The results of this action were evidently considered satisfactory by the High Command.'

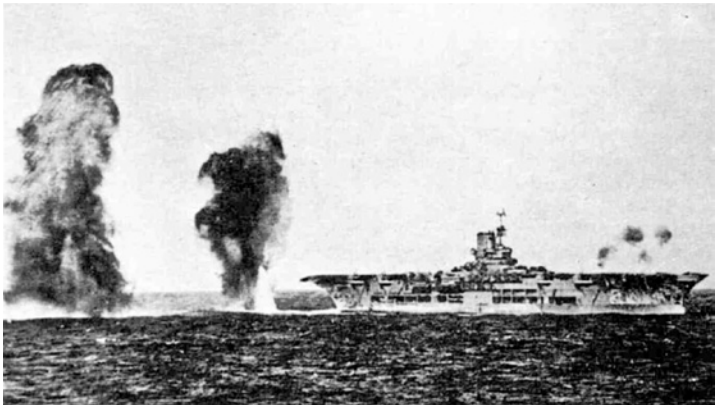
During this action bombs dropped by 8° and 32° *Stormi* S.79s caused minor damage to *Ark Royal* and to the battleships HMS *Resolution* and HMS *Hood*.

On 1 August one *squadriglia* each from 8° and 32° *Stormi* attacked warships of Gibraltar's Force 'H' south of the Balearics, and S.79 MM21795/18-1 of 18ª *Squadriglia* (27° *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo*) was lost. Its pilot was none other than *Generale di Brigata Aerea* Stefano Cagna, who perished along with co-pilot Tenente Colonnello Nello Capanni, Tenente Prince Carlo Pallavicini, Maggiore Spolverato and three other crewmen. Cagna was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*. According to British sources, Cagna's 18-1 was shot down by 803 NAS Skuas from *Ark Royal*, although the Italians reported that it was downed by anti-aircraft fire. During this engagement shrapnel from the S.79s' bombs inflicted modest internal damage on *Ark Royal*. Three 50ª *Squadriglia* trimotors led by Colonnello Luigi Gallo, two of which were slightly damaged, mistakenly landed in French Algeria owing to the patrol leader's compass having been hit. The crews were repatriated the following day, Sottotenente Cimicchi being among their number.

At 36 years of age, *Generale di Brigata Aerea* Stefano Cagna was the youngest Italian general. An Atlantic flyer with his close friend Generale Italo Balbo, Cagna led X *Brigata Aerea* 'Marte', comprising 8° and 32° *Stormi*, flying from Sardinia in 1940. He and his crew fell in combat while attacking Gibraltar's Force 'H' on 1 August that year (*AM*)

On the afternoon of 4 September 8° and 32° *Stormi* S.79s attacked vessels from Force 'H' west of Sardinia, achieving near-misses that damaged the Polish destroyer ORP *Garland* off Algiers. The destroyer, with two boilers leaking, was taken in tow by HMS *Griffin* and reached Gibraltar the next day.

At 1100 hrs on 9 November, 20 32° Stormo S.79s led by Tenente Colonnello Umberto Mecozzi attacked Gibraltar Force 'H' warships tasked with diversionary support of Operation *Judgement* (the raid on Taranto). Three of *Ark Royal*'s 808 NAS Fulmars and six 800 NAS Skua fighters retaliated vigorously, damaging 18 S.79s and killing three airmen, with eight more wounded, among the 38° *Gruppo* crews. Bombs from the *Sparvieri* harmlessly straddled the battleship HMS *Barham* and the destroyer HMS *Duncan*. Eighteen days later, S.79s from both 28° and 89° *Gruppi* (ten aircraft each) bombed Force 'H' warships during the Battle of Cape



During 1940 HMS *Ark Royal*, seen here straddled by bombs on 27 November 1940, was frequently attacked by S.79s from Sardinia. Near-misses damaged the carrier on 9 July, 1 August and 27 November (*IWM*)

Spartivento/Teulada. According to Admiral Sir James Somerville, Commander-in-Chief of Force 'H', *Ark Royal* was completely obscured by water splashed up by bombs that just missed the carrier – indeed, two of them fell within ten yards of the ship and caused internal damage. *Sparvieri* bomb splinters also peppered the destroyers HMS *Firedrake* and HMS *Defender*.

On 9 January 1941 ten 89° *Gruppo* S.79s again bombed British warships, achieving near misses against the battleship HMS *Malaya* and the light cruiser HMS *Gloucester*. They were intercepted by 808 NAS Fulmars, and the unit's CO, Lt Rupert Tillard, achieved ace status when he destroyed two 228ª *Squadriglia* trimotors – he had previously downed S.79s on 8 and 27 November 1940. A third S.79 from the same unit was damaged and a crewman wounded.

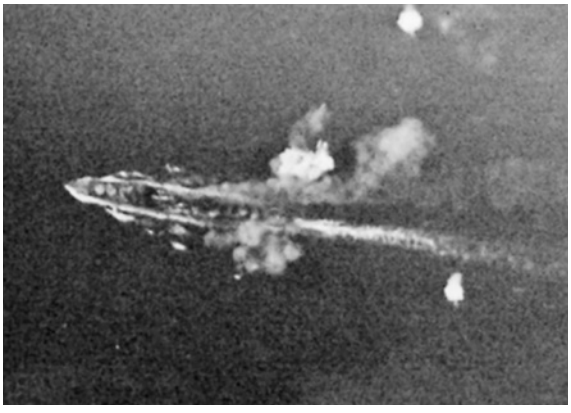
The next major action involving Sardinian-based S.79s took place on 8 May 1941 when the *Sparvieri* attacked the Alexandria-bound Convoy WS 8, codenamed *Tiger*. Upon vessels being sighted, 32° *Stormo* trimotor MM23940 left Decimomannu with Capitano Armando Boetto at the controls, the CO of 38° *Gruppo*'s 49ª *Squadriglia* being tasked with reporting the convoy's precise movements. At 1345 hrs Boetto signalled the ships' position, but shortly thereafter *Ark Royal* launched four 807 NAS Fulmars to engage the shadower. Fulmars flown by future ace Lt N N 'Buster' Hallett and PO A G Johnson scored strikes on Boetto's S.79, whose return fire struck Hallett's fighter, forcing him to ditch. Both the pilot and his observer, Lt V A Smith, were later rescued by the destroyer HMS *Foresight*. Meanwhile, ace Lt R E Gardner and Lt K Firth in two more Fulmars fired at Boetto's trimotor, which exploded in mid-air, killing its crew. Boetto was subsequently awarded a posthumous *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*, his reports having enabled the S.79 units to launch attacks against the convoy.

Fourteen 32° *Stormo* and five 10ª *Squadriglia* trimotors (28° *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo*) duly attacked Convoy WS 8 between 1515 hrs and 1700 hrs, opposed by *Ark Royal*'s Fulmars. The S.79s' bombs failed to score any hits, however, and 89° *Gruppo*'s 228ª *Squadriglia* bomber flown by Sottotenente Fonseca was destroyed by Fulmars flown by Lts Kindersley and ace Ronnie Hay of 808 NAS. Lethal anti-aircraft fire also damaged S.79s 49-9 (Tenente Morsellino), 49-8 (Tenente Figus) and MM22325/229-2 (Sottotenente Berta), with an airman suffering wounds in the latter machine.

The next day, two Sicilian-based S.79 shadowers were driven off by Bristol Beaufighters of No 252 Sqn that were screening the convoy. The *Sparvieri* mounted further attacks on 10 May, when five 32° *Stormo* trimotors bombed five vessels of the 8th Destroyer Flotilla, damaging HMS *Fortune* and reducing its speed to eight knots. Meanwhile, tragedy struck 38° *Gruppo* when, at 1640 hrs, five 49ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Colonnello Gallo's 49-1 took off, only for two of them to crash moments later owing to a loss of speed. Laden with fuel, both bombers burst into flames. Only three

airmen escaped from the burning wrecks of 49-6 (Tenente Figus) and 49-7 (Tenente Domeniconi), this tragic episode ending the S.79s' participation in Operation *Tiger*.

From 23 July 1941 both Sardinian- and Sicilian-based S.79s attacked the Malta-bound Convoy GM 1, codenamed *Substance*. At 0910 hrs that day ten approaching 32° *Stormo* S.79s led by Tenente Colonnello Antonio Fadda were detected by the ships' radars and intercepted by Fulmars from *Ark Royal*'s 807 and 808 NAS. The fighters shot down the 38° *Gruppo* S.79 flown by Tenente Luigi Astolfi and damaged six others, although the bombers' lethal return fire accounted for two Fulmars, whose crews were rescued. At 1935 hrs, five S.79s of 10° *Stormo*'s 32° *Gruppo*, led by Tenente Colonnello Marcucci, whose bomb aimer was Sottotenente Giovanni Briatore, dropped 20 250 kg bombs. These hit the destroyer HMS *Firedrake*, knocking its boiler room out, and straddled the cruiser HMS *Edinburgh*, which escaped damage. The stationary *Firedrake* was towed to Gibraltar by HMS *Eridge*.



A very near miss for a destroyer off the Sardinian coast during Operation *Substance* on 24 July 1941, the warship being targeted by S.79s whilst attempting to provide protection for merchantmen in Malta-bound Convoy GM 1 (*AM*)

The next day, during various different actions, 32° *Stormo* S.79s achieved near-misses against the freighters *Svenor* (also bombed by an 87° *Gruppo* patrol), *Amerika*, *Thermopylae*, *Talabot* and *Breconshire*. At 1740 hrs a patrol by 89° *Gruppo*'s 228ª *Squadriglia*, led by Capitano Giuseppe Falciola, unsuccessfully attacked the destroyer HMS *Encounter*.

At 1100 hrs on 25 July, 32° *Stormo* fought its last *Substance* action when eight S.79s were bounced by four Fulmars from 808 NAS. The latter shot down S.79 MM21464/229-6, flown by Sottotenente Giovanni Birocchi, in flames and damaged seven others. The Italian gunners' fierce return fire accounted for two Fulmars flown by Lts Kindersley (crew lost) and Cockburn (crew safe). One Fulmar kill was credited to 1° Aviere Motorista Rolando Ricci, acting as a gunner on board Tenente Francesco Leonardi's 228ª *Squadriglia* S.79. Ricci was horribly wounded in the face by a burst of fire, losing his eyesight. For his courage in battle he became a living recipient of the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*.

THE *PEDESTAL* BATTLE

From the late summer of 1941 and for much of 1942 the S.79s flew over Malta mainly at night in order to reduce their exposure to RAF fighters, performing both reconnaissance and naval escort duties. In response to the pivotal Operation *Pedestal* convoy, on which Malta's very survival as an Allied stronghold hinged, at about 1700 hrs on 12 August 1942, a 32° *Gruppo* (10° *Stormo*) *Sparviero* spotted Malta-bound Convoy WS 21S. That same day 32° *Gruppo* S.79 MM22063, flown by Capitano Giovanni Mollo, was undertaking a reconnaissance mission when it was shot down by carrier fighters. Before the aircraft crashed into sea, Mollo's dorsal gunner downed the 809 NAS Fulmar flown by Sub-Lt Nihill and LAC Regan. This dramatic S.79 kill was shared among HMS *Victorious*'s 884 NAS Fulmars and 885 NAS Sea Hurricanes, as well as with HMS *Indomitable*'s 800 and 880 NAS

Sea Hurricanes (the latter squadron's aircraft flown by ace Lt 'Dickie' Cork and Lt Hamish Muir-Mackenzie, who scored just a few hits).

The following day 10° *Stormo* was battered by Malta-based Spitfires, Flt Lt Les Watts of No 249 Sqn in EP448/'F' claiming a bomber damaged. 30° *Gruppo* reported one 55ª *Squadriglia* S.79 slightly damaged, while another from 56ª *Squadriglia* escaped. A third trimotor from 56ª *Squadriglia*, damaged by anti-aircraft fire, went up in flames upon landing at Pantelleria. In addition, 32° *Gruppo* lost 58ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM21544, flown by Tenente Bartolomeo Ferrante, which was shot down by a No 1435 Sqn Spitfire flown by ace Sgt Allan Scott.

On 14 August 10° *Stormo*'s ordeal continued when five S.79s that were airborne at dawn were intercepted by a No 235 Sqn Beaufighter flown by Flg Off Wood. 56ª *Squadriglia* trimotor MM22184, flown by Tenente Alfonso Battistini, was shot down, while another machine from the same unit crash-landed at Pantelleria and was burnt out.

AEGEAN *SPARVIERI*

In June 1940 the Italian bomber force in the Aegean Dodecanese islands consisted of just 30 39° *Stormo* S.81 trimotors. On 28 June these aircraft were reinforced by 12 34° *Gruppo* S.79s and on 6 July by an undisclosed number of *Sparvieri* from Maggiore Ettore Muti's 41° *Gruppo*. Nine days later 42° *Gruppo* also arrived in-theatre. By then the S.79s had already seen combat when, at 1630 hrs on 30 June, four 68ª *Squadriglia* (34° *Gruppo*) trimotors led by Tenente Francesco Pepe's MM22142/68-9 had attacked the light cruiser HMS *Neptune* south of Crete. The vessel was damaged by bomb splinters and had its Fairey Seafox seaplane scout destroyed.

Ten minutes later, bombs from three 67ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Maggiore Cannaviello in MM22070/67-9 fell ahead of the light cruiser HMAS *Sydney*. Accurate anti-aircraft fire damaged both Cannaviello's mount and trimotor MM21991/67-8, flown by Tenente Antonino Zingales. At 1715 hrs two bombs from solitary S.79 MM22292/68-10 flown by Capitano Cesare Ciochino fell clear of the port quarter of light cruiser HMS *Orion*.

On 30 June 1940 the cruiser HMS *Neptune* was attacked south of Crete at 1630 hrs by four 68ª *Squadriglia* (34° *Gruppo*) S.79s whose shell splinters damaged the warship and disabled its seaplane scout (*AM*)

On 4 July nine 34° *Gruppo* S.79s flew the *Regia Aeronautica*'s first daylight raid on the Egyptian port city of Alexandria. The Italian trimotors damaged the 2900-ton netlayer HMS *Protector* and killed two ratings, but they were then intercepted north of the town by two No 80 Sqn Gladiators flown by Flg Offs 'Sam' Weller and 'Shorty' Graham. The biplanes targeted 67ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM22070/67-9, flown by Maggiore Vittorio Cannaviello, badly wounding three airmen, including gunner Sergente Maggiore Armando Di Tullio. Bomb aimer Capitano Ugo Pozza took over Di Tullio's lateral gun and returned fire until he was fatally hit. Despite leg wounds, Di Tullio replaced Pozza at the gun until a shot to his head instantly killed him. Both Maggiore Cannaviello and co-pilot Maresciallo Giuseppe Fugaroli nursed the crippled S.79, which had sustained 150 bullet holes, back to Rhodes.

During this action, two other 67ª *Squadriglia* trimotors, MM21990/67-7 piloted by Tenente Umberto Barbani and MM22216/67-10 with Tenente Vincenzo Roncati at the controls, were damaged. Both Capitano Pozza and Sergente Maggiore Di Tullio were posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro* for their gallantry.

During the bloody Alexandria raid of 4 July 1940, three 67ª *Squadriglia* S.79s were damaged by No 80 Sqn Gladiators. One was MM21990/67-7 flown by Tenente Umberto Barbani, a future torpedo-bomber pilot, the S.79 being seen here after returning to Rhodes (*courtesy ItAF/HS*)

Aegean S.79s also played their part on 8 July when, from 1410 hrs, S.79s of 34° and 41° *Gruppi* flew 11 attacks on warships of the Mediterranean Fleet. Along with 41° *Gruppo* and Libyan-based 15° *Stormo*, 34° *Gruppo* trimotors damaged the battleship HMS *Malaya* south of Crete. 34° *Gruppo*, acting alone, also accounted for damage to the battleships HMS *Royal Sovereign* and HMS *Warspite* and the carrier *Eagle*. A 204ª *Squadriglia* (41° *Gruppo*) S.79 forced-landed on Crete, the Greeks interning pilot Tenente Renato Torelli and his crew.

During the late afternoon of 27 July Rhodes-based S.79s flew five raids against the strongly-escorted Alexandria-bound Convoy AS 2. At least 63 bombs were dropped, most of which fell harmlessly close to *Warspite*. At around 1750 hrs nine 34° *Gruppo* trimotors led by Maggiore Cannaviello's veteran MM21802/67-1 claimed one cruiser hit, but accurate anti-aircraft fire damaged Tenente Zingales' MM22216/67-10. Thirty minutes later, nine 41° *Gruppo* Savoias led by Maggiore Ettore Muti in 205-12 reported attacking a 'warship of line'. One of these aforementioned attacks almost certainly targeted HMAS *Sydney*, Lt W H Ross on board the cruiser subsequently recalling;

'We were in the midst of our meal in the wardroom, suddenly, without warning, we heard the hair-raising whistle of approaching bombs. Eating ceased at a stroke, ears were cocked, and then as one man we yelled "Bombs!" someone adding, "Yes, and they're going to fall bloody close!"'

Maggiore Ettore Muti adjusts his flying helmet before takeoff. A living *Medaglia d'Oro* recipient from the conflict in Spain, he boldly led 41° *Gruppo* S.79s into action over Corsica and the eastern Mediterranean (*via author*)

They did. A salvo of S.79 'eggs' straddled *Sydney*, splinters inflicting two casualties on board and rendering the cruiser's seaplane unserviceable. According to the RAN official history this attack took place at around 1900 hrs, thus corresponding either with Cannaviello's or Muti's raid (most probably Muti's).

At 1720 hrs on 29 July six 68ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Cesare Ciochino's MM22292/68-10 bombed Convoy AS 2's escorts north of Sidi Barrani and claimed a cruiser hit amidships. In fact a bomb struck the light cruiser HMS *Liverpool* ahead of its bridge and penetrated 'B' gun deck without exploding, although it killed a rating, Stoker Patrick Harney. The next day, a 206ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Tenente Colonnello Ademaro Nicoletti Altimari, a former transatlantic pilot and CO of 42° *Gruppo* (12° *Stormo*), left Rhodes for a night raid. Forced to land shortly thereafter on bumpy terrain following mechanical failure, the trimotor burst into flames as it came to a halt. Although he was enveloped in flames, Altimari remained in the burning wreck until all of his crew had escaped. This gallant officer later succumbed to his injuries and was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro*.

On 7 August the ranks of the Aegean-based *Sparvieri* increased when 92° *Gruppo* converted to S.79s, being equipped with former 12° *Stormo* aircraft. At the end of that same month the unit was heavily involved in opposing

On 30 July 1940 the 206ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Tenente Colonnello Ademaro Nicoletti Altimari, CO of 42° *Gruppo* (12° *Stormo*), crashed on takeoff and burst into flames. Although his bomber was burning furiously, Altimari did not abandon his S.79 until his men were safe. This gallant officer later succumbed to his injuries, and he was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro* (*AM*)

Operation *Hats*, which was mounted primarily to reinforce the Royal Navy's assets in the eastern Mediterranean and get supplies through to Malta. At 1155 hrs on 31 August ten 34° *Gruppo* S.79s attacked Convoy MF 2 west of Crete, near-missing the destroyer HMS *Dainty* and damaging the 11,288-ton steamer *Cornwall* with three bombs. The latter ship had its radio room destroyed, killing Junior Radio Operator Chamberlain, and its steering gear disabled. Holed below the waterline, the steamer also had its guns wrecked and nine seamen wounded. Fire spread to *Cornwall*'s after hold, detonating the ship's magazine. However, the Master, Capt Francis Cecil Pretty, managed to control the fire and continue steering by using the main engines. The crippled freighter was towed into Malta's Grand Harbour at 0900 hrs on 2 September.

Two days later, Swordfish from *Illustrious* and *Eagle* mounted raids on Kalathos and Gadoura airfields on Rhodes. At Gadoura, 68ª *Squadriglia* S.79s MM22292/68-10 and MM21864/68-5 were destroyed and MM21802/67-1 and MM22141/67-2 of 67ª *Squadriglia* damaged. However, this success cost the Fleet Air Arm four of *Eagle*'s Swordfish, which were lost to Fiat biplane fighters.

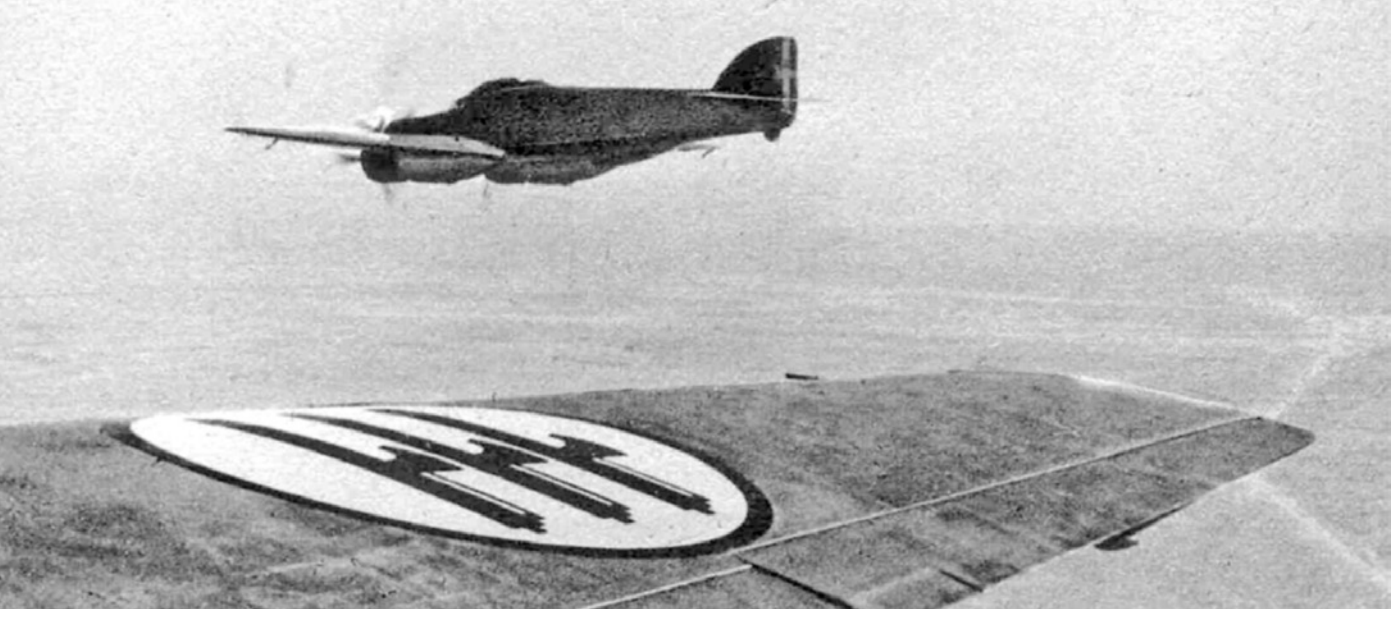
Rhodes' *Sparvieri* counterattacked, targeting British warships, but they were intercepted by 806 NAS Fulmars. First, future ace Lt Barnes and Sub-Lt Sewell engaged 34° *Gruppo* S.79s, damaging both Capitano Ciochino's MM22121 of 68ª *Squadriglia* and Tenente Turretta's MM22120 of 67ª *Squadriglia* (the latter aircraft had a gunner killed and another wounded). Thirty minutes later Barnes and Sewell engaged two 201ª *Squadriglia* (92° *Gruppo*) S.79s flown by Capitano Costante Lazzarini (MM22135/201-1) and Tenente Nicola Dell'Olio (MM21396/201-5). Bursts from the Fulmars badly damaged Lazzarini's aircraft and wounded five crewmen, whilst Dell'Olio's machine was shot down in flames.

At about the same time Maggiore Cannaviello, in MM22271 of 67ª *Squadriglia*, led Tenente Pepe of 68ª *Squadriglia*, in MM22142/68-9, and Sottotenente Simone of 200ª *Squadriglia*, in MM22306, in an attack against Royal Navy warships. Although Cannaviello claimed a light cruiser hit aft (probably the destroyer HMS *Ilex*), Simone's aircraft was attacked by three Fulmars that scored 20 hits on the S.79's port side and killed co-pilot Sergente Alberto Massari, who was manning one of the lateral guns at the time. This attack matches the report submitted by Sub-Lt Godfrey, who, flying Fulmar N1871, claimed to have hit the port engine of an S.79. Four other 34° *Gruppo* S.79s, including Tenente Maltinti's MM22141/67-2, were damaged by naval gun fire while attacking warships at 1535 hrs.

At 1330 hrs on 1 November four 67ª *Squadriglia* S.79s targeted Suda Bay, catching the light cruiser HMS *Ajax* as it was disembarking troops of the 2nd Battalion Yorks and the Lancaster Regiment. However, the Italian bombers only managed to sink a Greek fuel barge. The anti-aircraft cruisers HMS *Calcutta* and HMS *Coventry* opened up on the S.79s, damaging all four trimotors, including MM21990/67-7, flown by Tenente Lelio Silva.

At 1705 hrs on 27 February 1941 200ª *Squadriglia* (92° *Gruppo*) S.79s MM22344 (Capitano De Rosa), MM22309 (Sottotenente Cuccurullo) and MM21362 (Sottotenente Gastone Sacchetto) bombed and damaged the Greek steamer *Georgios Krinis* in Milos Bay.

S.79s saw progressively less action in the Aegean from that point onward as the *Regia Aeronautica* turned its attention to other theatres.



Marshal Balbo's S.79 over Tobruk, seen from Generale Porro's trimotor on 28 June 1940. Just a few minutes later the Marshal's aircraft was shot down in flames by Italian anti-aircraft batteries (*via author*)

CHAPTER FIVE

WAR OVER NORTH AFRICA

On 10 June 1940 the *Regia Aeronautica* bomber force in Libya included some S.79-equipped units. 33° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre* (BT), with a strength of 31 trimotors, was based at Bir el Bhera airfield, 10° *Stormo*, with 30 aircraft, was at Benina, 15° *Stormo* had 35 S.79s at Maraua and 14° *Stormo*, still partly S.81-equipped, was operating 12 trimotors from El Adem.

At 1903 hrs on 11 June, 18 Blenheims from Nos 55 and 113 Sqns raided El Adem, damaging five of 14° *Stormo*'s S.79s on the ground. This attack cost No 113 Sqn one aircraft, however, for L4823 was downed by a 2° *Stormo* CR.42 flown by Tenente Gioacchino Bissoli (all of its crew were captured). A No 55 Sqn aircraft was also damaged. Three days later Libyan-based S.79s retaliated when 12 trimotors from 15° *Stormo*, led by Colonnello Silvio Napoli, bombed British troops in Sollum, on the Egyptian border with Libya, in the morning. Seventeen 10° *Stormo* S.79s led by Colonnello Giovanni Benedetti and escorted by 10° *Gruppo* CR.42s targeted Sollum again at 1650 hrs. Within the 10° *Stormo* formation, 32° *Gruppo* CO Tenente Colonnello Carlo Unia, in S.79 57-8, led five 57ª *Squadriglia* trimotors, one of which was reported to have been slightly damaged by British fighters, probably a Gladiator from No 33 Sqn.

On the night of 20/21 June S.79s undertook their first night raids when, at 0125 hrs Colonnello Silvio Napoli led 12 15° *Stormo* aircraft in an attack on the Egyptian port town of Mersa Matruh. Over the target anti-aircraft

Maresciallo dell'Aria Italo Balbo, the renowned Atlantic flyer and former Italian Air Force Minister, was Libya's General Governor from 1934 to 1940 (*via author*)

fire struck 21ª *Squadriglia* S.79 21-6 of 46° *Gruppo*, flown by Maresciallo Giovanni Lampugnani, and it collided with 21-1, flown by 21ª *Squadriglia* CO Capitano Daniele Zelè. Lampugnani's crew perished in the crash of their S.79, but Zelè managed to crash-land his damaged aircraft near Mersa Matruh, where he and his men were captured. These were the first S.79s to be lost in action in North Africa. Two days later, a British aircraft dropped a bundle of letters written by Zelè's crewmen behind Italian lines. This disastrous mission was recalled by one of its participants, Sottotenente Bruno Pavan;

'We took off on patrol, strengthened by our Castel Benito experience. The bomb-bay was filled with 250 kg bombs, and we darted over the coast at 2500 m. Over Mersa Matruh a violent barrage welcomed us, but we were able to drop with precision. That's all? We could then return. We banked westwards, but a big light blazed near me – the burning starboard wingman pulled up, falling down again onto the patrol leader's tail. Both went down! Later on I learned that the patrol leader had managed to land with the crew unharmed, prisoners, but safe!'

On 21 June Marshal Italo Balbo, Libya's General Governor who was famous for his pre-war international air cruises, proved his boldness in action. From the outset of the desert war British armoured cars had persistently harassed the Italians behind their own lines, keeping them constantly on the alert. That day Balbo was flying his personal S.79 near Bir el Gobi when, at 1230 hrs, he spotted, in his own words, 'one of those damned armoured cars running through all types of terrain and travelling at 50 kph'. This particular Morris CS9 armoured car of the 2nd Troop, 'B' Sqn, 11th Hussars, which had been immobilised as a result of engine trouble (or possibly damage inflicted by a strafing Italian aircraft, according to some accounts), was crewed by Troop Sergeant Major Howarth and Troopers Freeman, Young and Prewett.

Balbo's S.79 touched down briefly and then took off again, with co-pilot Maggiore Ottavio Frailich at the controls, after the Marshal and his nephew, Tenente Lino Balbo, had jumped out. The two men rushed to the nearest outpost, calling for reinforcements. The Italian force then encircled the four Hussars, who surrendered without a fight. After loading their captives on board his S.79, Balbo flew them back to Tobruk. To hearten their troops, the Italians gave this episode enormous publicity, although Balbo was to enjoy his personal triumph for only one week.

On 21 June 1940 Marshal Balbo landed in the desert in his S.79 and personally organised the capture of an immobilised Morris CS9 armoured car of the 2nd Troop, 'B' Sqn, 11th Hussars and its four-man crew near Bir el Gobi. Here, the British PoWs (bottom right) shelter from the sun beneath the Marshal's trimotor (*via author*)

At 1715 hrs on 28 June nine Blenheims of No 55 Sqn bombed Tobruk T2 airfield, destroying a 10° *Gruppo*, 90ª *Squadriglia* CR.42 on the ground and damaging several Fiat fighters. In addition, 11 men were killed and two 10° *Gruppo* pilots were wounded, one fatally. Soon after this attack, at 1732 hrs, two overcrewed S.79s, each with nine men on board, approached to land, the air being thick with dense smoke. They were flown by Marshal Balbo and *Generale di Squadra Aerea* Felice Porro, AOC *Aeronautica della Libia*. Unnerved by the previous attack, the crews manning the airfield's anti-aircraft guns mistook the approaching trimotors

for enemy bombers and opened up, with catastrophic consequences. Balbo's S.79 was hit and, burning furiously, crashed to the ground, killing all on board, including co-pilot Maggiore Frailich and Tenente Lino Balbo. Fortunately, Porro's trimotor escaped such a fate, as co-pilot Capitano Leardi immediately broke off his approach to the airfield upon seeing shells erupting around him.

Balbo's totally destroyed S.79 on the spot where it crashed. The aircraft reportedly burned for hours (*via author*)

Balbo's tragic fate made a great impression. When the funerals of the S.79 crew took place some days later, the AOC of No 202 Group, World War 1 ace Air Cdre Raymond Collishaw, sent over an aircraft that dropped a wreath with a personal message from Air Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, C-in-C RAF Middle East, commemorating the famous Italian aviator. As a consequence of this incident, thenceforth all Italian aircraft carried black 'Xs' on the underside of their wings as an easily visible recognition marking so as to avoid further misidentification.

On 5 July six 15° *Stormo* S.79s bombed Buq Buq, in Egypt, where they caught 12 Gladiators of No 33 Sqn's 'C' Flight on the ground being refuelled – two of the fighters were badly damaged by bomb splinters. Although 'B' Flight scrambled to engage the S.79s, they failed to intercept the bombers. The following day the 3rd Cruiser Squadron, comprising the light cruisers HMS *Capetown* and HMS *Caledon*, with four destroyers, shelled the Libyan port of Bardia, setting the steamer *Sant'Antonio* alight. An attack on the vessels by five 15° *Stormo* S.79s got off to a poor start when two of the trimotors crashed on takeoff, although the remaining bombers were credited with having hit one of the naval vessels.

At 1840 hrs on 8 July, during the initial stages of the Battle of Calabria/Punta Stilo, a bomb dropped by high-flying S.79s of 10° *Stormo* struck the deck of the cruiser *Gloucester*, killing 18 sailors, including the ship's Captain, Frederick Garside, and wounding nine others. Among the attackers was S.79 MM21360/58-5, flown by Sottotenente Emilio Pucci, a future torpedo-bomber ace.

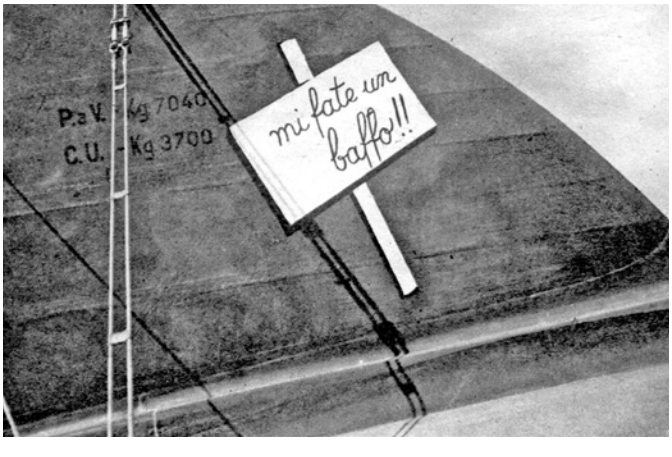
Two days later six S.79s of 10° *Stormo*'s 32° *Gruppo* (three each from 57ª and 58ª *Squadriglie*), led by *gruppo* CO Tenente Colonnello Carlo Unia in 58-1, bombed Sidi Barrani airfield, destroying a No 208 Sqn Westland Lysander on the ground. Two Gladiators from No 33 Sqn, flown by future ace Flg Off Richard Acworth and Flg Off 'Teddy' Banks (both No 112 Sqn pilots attached to the unit), intercepted the bombers but they were outdistanced by two machines when they jettisoned their bomb loads into sea. However, the remaining four aircraft were successfully engaged, with the central propeller hub of S.79 58-7, flown by Tenente Nicoletti, being hit by six machine gun rounds. S.79 MM21405/57-6 (pilots Tenente Luigi Vicoli and Maresciallo Aldo Cima) had two of its gunners killed (Sergente Pietro Angelin and 1° Aviere Armiere Giovanni Cibrario) and another wounded (1° Aviere Antonio Camedda), leaving just flight engineer Sergente Maggiore

Giordano Cucchi to return fire. The crippled trimotor eventually forced-landed 60 km north of Tobruk, its surviving crew being saved by a rescue lorry. S.79 57-1, flown by Spanish war veteran Capitano Giorgio Mayer Ziotti, was holed by 30 rounds – despite a wounded knee, flight engineer Maresciallo Motorista Pietro Faltoni continued to control the engines. Finally, trimotor 57-2, flown by Capitano Castiglione, was hit by 20 rounds.

On 12 July *Warspite*, in company with the cruisers *Sydney* and *Liverpool*, suffered several attacks by S.79s, bomb splinters killing two ratings and wounding six on board the latter vessel. The war diary of 15° *Stormo* reports 11 S.79 patrols flown and one battleship and two cruisers being hit.

At 1430 hrs the following day, three No 30 Sqn Blenheim I fighters, covering Royal Navy warships 160 miles north of Mersa Matruh, intercepted three S.79s of 46° *Gruppo* (15° *Stormo*), led by Tenente Diego Recagno in 20-4, which were targeting vessels. Two Blenheims engaged while the third provided top cover for the ships. They scored hits on all of the S.79s, but the bombers' return fire sent Blenheim K7181/VT-X down in flames, killing Plt Off D Lea and Sgt C Burt. This victory was credited to 1° Aviere Marconista Dino Ornani, acting gunner on board Tenente Edmondo Pistani's 20-6. The crews of trimotors 21-2 (Sottotenente Bruno Pavan) and patrol leader 20-4 claimed a second Blenheim as a shared victory, but only Lea's fighter was lost. For this action Tenente Recagno, Sottotenenti Pistani and Rissone (Recagno's co-pilot) and 1° Aviere Marconista Ornani all earned the *Medaglia d'Argento al Valor Militare*. In addition to the three Blenheims, both 15° *Stormo* and 20ª *Squadriglia* war diaries mention a Gladiator that was outdistanced after an initial attack. According to British records, Lt Lloyd Keith of 815 NAS, flying Sea Gladiator N5513 from HMS *Eagle*, claimed one of five(!) S.79s destroyed at 1450 hrs.

On 15 July all-new 33° *Gruppo* BT, commanded by Tenente Colonnello Ferri Forte and comprising 59ª and 60ª *Squadriglie* (led by Capitani Luciano Guidoni and Loris Bulgarelli, respectively) arrived in Libya. The next day the remarkable Colonnello Attilio Biseo took over command of 33° *Stormo* from Colonnello Leonardi. During a night raid on Mersa Matruh two days later, S.79 MM22333/58-3 of 58ª *Squadriglia* (32° *Gruppo*, 10° *Stormo*) was lost to either anti-aircraft fire or a No 33 Sqn Gladiator, whose unnamed pilot claimed a *Sparviero* victory 14 miles south of Mersa Matruh. Pilot Tenente Giulio Cabassi and four aircrew perished, with only wireless operator 1° Aviere Fabozzi being captured.



The comic *mi fate un baffo!!* ('you cannot hurt me!!') emblem that adorned the fins of some of 33° *Gruppo*'s 60ª *Squadriglia* S.79s (*via author*)

On 25 July the *Aeronautica della Libia* was renamed 5ª *Squadra Aerea*, with its headquarters at Cirene. That same day 175ª *Squadriglia Ricognizione Strategica Terrestre* (RST – Land-based Strategic Reconnaissance) was formed at Tobruk T5 airfield. At 0850 hrs two Blenheim patrols from No 55 Sqn, escorted by five Gladiators of 'B' Flight, No 33 Sqn, and one from No 112 Sqn, raided Derna airfield, where 56ª *Squadriglia* (30° *Gruppo*, 10° *Stormo*) suffered two S.79s destroyed and five groundcrew killed, with 17 more wounded.

At 1250 hrs on 29 July three 43ª *Squadriglia* (35° *Gruppo*, 33° *Stormo*) S.79s bombed Convoy AS 2 north of Sidi Barrani, later claiming that two bombs had set a steamer afire. Two of *Eagle*'s Sea Gladiators, flown by Lts Lloyd Keith and Pat Massy (the latter from 813 NAS), intercepted the bombers, with the latter shooting down S.79 MM21629 (pilot Tenente Francesco Casolla and crew missing). However, Massy's aircraft, N5512, ran out of fuel shortly thereafter and he was obliged to ditch, later being rescued by the RAN destroyer HMAS *Stuart*.

On 15 August S.79s of 10° *Stormo* bombed Alexandria, sinking the mooring vessel HMS *Moorstone* and killing one of its ratings. Two days later, between 0950 hrs and 1025 hrs, 25 S.79s of 10°, 15° and 33° *Stormi* attacked the battleships *Warspite, Malaya* and HMS *Ramillies* and the heavy cruiser HMS *Kent*, which at 0645 hrs had shelled the Bardia sector. Initially, the five S.79s of 33° *Stormo* were repelled by three Sea Gladiators from *Eagle* and six Gladiators from No 112 Sqn's 'A' Flight, leaving the remaining two S.79 patrols (ten trimotors each from 10° and 15° *Stormi*) to be jumped by RAF Gladiators and a single Hurricane, P2544, of 'A' Flight, No 80 Sqn, flown by future ace Flg Off John Lapsley.

In the ensuing battle the Italians had three 10° *Stormo* S.79s shot down and eight others damaged (two of them also from 10° *Stormo*, one of which later crash-landed). Flg Off Acworth of No 112 Sqn was wounded by return fire from the S.79s and disengaged. This was the first time a Hurricane had engaged S.79s, and Flg Off Lapsley was credited with three victories, all confirmed by Italian war diaries. *Regia Aeronautica* reports credit the loss of 56ª *Squadriglia* S.79s MM22313 56-9 (Tenente Arturo Lauchard and crew captured), MM21351 56-7 (Sottotenente Camillo Mussi and crew all killed) and 56-2 (flown by Sottotenente Venosta) to a Hurricane (Lapsley). Seriously damaged by the RAF fighter, 56-2 crash-landed near Tobruk with one wounded crewman on board.

Lapsley did not attack alone, being supported by No 112 Sqn Gladiators. Indeed, future aces Flt Lt Lloyd 'Algy' Schwab and Plt Off Peter Wickham claimed one S.79 destroyed apiece. The third 10° *Stormo* S.79 to be downed was 57ª *Squadriglia* aircraft MM22333/57-7 flown by Tenente Visentin (crew killed), while Capitano Gerardo Musch's MM21353/56-1 was damaged. To add insult to injury, the British displayed the wreck of 56-9 as a war prize in Alexandria's Ismailia Square.

Tenente Lauchard's S.79 MM22313/56-9 of 56ª *Squadriglia* was shot down on 17 August 1940 and subsequently retrieved from the desert by the British Army, who exhibited it as a war prize in Alexandria's Ismailia Square (*via author*)

During this bloody combat 1° Aviere Armiere Antonio Trevigni, a gunner on board a 53ª *Squadriglia* (47° *Gruppo*, 15° *Stormo*) S.79 kept firing at British fighters despite serious wounds to a shoulder and both legs (one crushed and another broken). Having claimed two 'kills' (probably Acworth), and refusing assistance offered by his crewmates, Trevigni told them to worry about the enemy and then crawled to the cockpit to

praise his pilot for the action just flown. Subsequently hospitalised, Trevigni courageously survived the amputation of his crushed leg, stating he was proud to have done his duty for his homeland. His bravery earned this valiant airman a *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*.

On 21 August British bombers raided Tmimi, destroying S.79s MM22100 and MM22023 of 44ª *Squadriglia* (35° *Gruppo*, 33° *Stormo*) and damaging several others. Fifteen days later, three 57ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Tenente Colonnello Unia in 57-8 took off at 1340 hrs to bomb Mersa Matruh, returning at 1735 hrs. The remaining two S.79s, 57-3 and 57-5, were flown by Tenenti Vittorio Organo and Virginio Guagnellini, respectively. This was the unit's last action in Africa.

Between 6 and 11 September 9° *Stormo* S.79s reached Libya from Italy, replacing war-weary 10° *Stormo*. The latter unit was repatriated between 6 and 20 September, its former pilot Sottotenente Emilio Pucci being posted to 33° *Gruppo*'s 60ª *Squadriglia* on the 11th. The S.79s of 9° *Stormo* would soon go into action, as the Italian offensive in Egypt was to start on 13 September.

Three days earlier, the S.79 had again revealed its vulnerability to modern multi-gunned monoplane fighters when Hurricanes of recently formed No 274 Sqn intercepted trimotors at 1400 hrs when they targeted Mersa Matruh. Aside from the two Hawker fighters, 12 No 80 Sqn Gladiators and two No 30 Sqn Blenheim I fighters were also encountered. In the ensuing combat two 46ª *Squadriglia* (36° *Gruppo*, 33° *Stormo*) S.79s were shot down – none of the crew from either Tenente Felice Scandone's MM21730 or Sottotenente Alfonso Magliacane's MM21194 survived. No 274 Sqn's Flg Off Lapsley was credited with destroying two S.79s, thus giving him ace status, although return fire from the *Sparvieri* completely shattered his windscreen.

At 1820 hrs that same day (10 September) another S.79 fell to friendly fire. At 1820 hrs Ain Gazala airfield was bombed, despite two 13° *Gruppo* CR.42s, flown by Sottotenente Mario Fabbricatore and Sergente Vincenzo Campolo, having been scrambled 15 minutes earlier. Searching for the British intruder, at 1820 hrs the two Fiat pilots saw Italian gun batteries firing at an aircraft flying along a line marked on the ground by British incendiary bombs, which led them to mistake it for an enemy machine. Immediately, Fabbricatore fired at the 'intruder' from 160 yards. He then followed the stricken aircraft as it descended in flames, but just as the trimotor touched down he saw the Italian national roundels on its wings and realised his error. It was a 59ª *Squadriglia* (33° *Gruppo*) S.79 flown by Tenente Vittorino Barion, and all of its crew were wounded bar two who panicked, bailed out prematurely and were killed.

The next day Plt Off Pearce in Blenheim IF L1120 of No 30 Sqn shot down an S.79 of 175ª *Squadriglia* that was on a reconnaissance mission over Alexandria, Tenente Antonio Bilancia and crew being posted as missing.

On 15 September ten S.79s of 15° *Stormo*'s 46° *Gruppo* and five from 33° *Gruppo* were attacked over the Sidi Barrani area by No 30 Sqn Blenheims, Nos 80 and 112 Sqns Gladiators and No 274 Sqn Hurricanes, which resulted in the destruction of three trimotors and damage being inflicted on four others, causing casualties among their surviving crews. The bombers' gunners put up fierce return fire, shooting down the Gladiator of No 80 Sqn's Plt Off A H Cholmeley, who was killed.

The following day two 60ª *Squadriglia* (33° *Gruppo*) S.79s were despatched at 1715 hrs to bomb British armoured vehicles at Bir Rabia, and the trimotors were mistakenly attacked northeast of Sollum at 1800 hrs by 15 CR.42s of 4° *Stormo*. The aircraft of Tenente Giovanni Roggero was shot down in flames, none of its crew surviving. Three airmen on board the other S.79, flown by Capitano Bulgarelli, were also wounded before a CR.42 pilot waggled his wings to signal that they had realised their mistake.

Capitano Victor-Hugo Girolami (right), CO of 63ª *Squadriglia* (29° *Gruppo*), conducts a pre-take-off briefing with a fellow officer. The latter is possibly Capitano Vincenzo Tedeschi, who was the CO of 62ª *Squadriglia* (*via author*)

On 21 September 41° *Stormo* arrived at Benina from Sicily, with 33° *Stormo* being ordered to repatriate to Italy. Eight days later the Mediterranean Fleet's *Warspite*, HMS *Valiant* and *Illustrious*, with three cruisers and 11 destroyers, set sail from Alexandria escorting the cruisers *Liverpool* and *Gloucester*, which were carrying 1200 RAF troops and stores to Malta in Operation MB 5. Libya-based 9° *Stormo Sparvieri* attacked the vessels north of Sidi Barrani, and naval gunfire shot down OC 62ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM22137 flown by unit CO Capitano Antonio Caprini, killing all on board. A salvo of bombs fell close to *Warspite*, causing superficial splinter damage to the battleship, and S.79 gunners claimed three 'Hurricanes' (actually Fulmars) downed. Only one 806 NAS Fulmar was lost, with future ace Sub-Lt Ivan Lowe falling to return fire from a Cant Z.501 floatplane and ditching near the destroyer HMAS *Stuart*, which rescued both him and his observer.

Throughout October CR.42-escorted S.79 formations heavily bombed Mersa Matruh. Over this target at 1345 hrs on the 5th, 14 S.79s of 9° *Stormo*, led by Colonnello Mario Aramu, drove off an attacking Gladiator, but S.79 63-6 was damaged by shell splinters. Eight days later, at 0805 hrs off Sidi Barrani, a 175ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Tenente Giulio Marini on a reconnaissance mission was chased by three Sea Gladiators from *Eagle*'s Fighter Flight. Lt R H Oliphant in N5567/6-C damaged the trimotor's tailplane and radio mast.

On 14 October eight 9° *Stormo* S.79s attacking British warships south of Crete were again intercepted by *Eagle*'s Sea Gladiators as well as 806 NAS Fulmars from *Illustrious*. In the ensuing combat three 63ª *Squadriglia* S.79s (63-6, 63-7 and 63-4) were damaged. *Sparviero* MM21445/63-4, flown by 63ª *Squadriglia* CO Capitano Victor-Hugo Girolami, returned to base with 90 holes and two wounded, one of whom, photographer 1° Aviere Otello Coldel, later died.

The last day of October also saw the *Sparvieri* suffer yet more losses. Initially, Menastir and Gambut airfields were raided by seven Blenheims from No 211 Sqn and two from No 84 Sqn, the attack being led by the CO of the former unit, Sqn Ldr James Gordon-Finlayson. At Gambut the Blenheims' bombs destroyed three 63ª *Squadriglia* S.79s (MM21542, MM20681 and MM22111) on the ground and damaged a fourth (MM22199). One of the stricken trimotors was coded 63-2, as the *squadriglia*'s CO, Capitano Victor-Hugo Girolami, later recalled;

'On the 31st we had a visit and four of our aircraft, including the glorious No 2, were destroyed. Poor Bonino [wireless operator 1°Aviere Eugenio

Bonino] died of wounds sustained, despite Zanatta, Orsimarsi and Vincenzi risking their own lives to try and drag him to safety when the explosion of bombs on board the aircraft was imminent.'

At 1300 hrs 26 S.79s from 9° and 14° *Stormi* and 33° *Gruppo*, escorted by 37 CR.42s of 151° *Gruppo* and 2° *Stormo*'s 13° *Gruppo*, were intercepted over Mersa Matruh by 12 Hurricanes from No 33 Sqn and nine Gladiators from No 112 Sqn. During the fierce air battle that ensued, 151° *Gruppo* claimed three Hurricanes and two Gladiators destroyed and two Hurricanes and one Gladiator as 'probables' for no losses. In addition, 13° *Gruppo* claimed four Gladiators and two monoplanes downed for the loss of one CR.42 (Sottotenente Gianfranco Perversi killed). The RAF reported two No 33 Sqn Hurricanes lost (Flg Off E K Leveille killed and Flg Off P R St Quintin safe), while No 112 Sqn reported one pilot (Flg Off R H Clarke) and five Gladiators lost (two downed and three written off in accidents).

The RAF fighter pilots in turn shot down two S.79 bombers from 11ª *Squadriglia* (26° *Gruppo*, 9° *Stormo*) and the aforementioned 13° *Gruppo* CR.42. The two trimotors lost were MM21851 (Tenente Fulvio Fabiani and crew missing) and MM21437 (Sottotenente Roberto Di Frassineto and crew killed, with Sergente Maggiore Armando Zambelli being the sole survivor). Two of 14° *Stormo*'s 44° *Gruppo* S.79s crash-landed and were declared total losses, with three more trimotors being damaged.

At 1305 hrs on 7 November 12 S.79s (six each from 33° *Gruppo* and 9° *Stormo*), along with 18 CR.32s and six Breda Ba.65s from 50° *Stormo*, raided Siwa Oasis, destroying a No 208 Sqn Lysander on the ground.

Eleven days later, at 2310 hrs, an S.79 of 14° *Stormo's* 45° *Gruppo*, flown by Tenente Sergio Sartof, bombed Alexandria, causing fires near the seaplane base. Sartof's aircraft had been preceded at 2045 hrs by a 114° *Gruppo* S.82 bomber. The 323-ton tanker *El Nawras* was also damaged in the attacks. The Egyptian base was raided again on 19 November by another S.79 of 45° *Gruppo*'s 2ª *Squadriglia*, which struck Ras el Tin pier at 0025 hrs, as well as by a 114° *Gruppo* S.82 at 0310 hrs. A large bomb dropped by one of these aircraft also struck houses near Karnous, destroying 146 dwellings, killing 76 civilians and injuring 204. Three S.79s were over Alexandria again between 0230-0535 hrs on 24 November, their bombs damaging the 821-ton oiler *Zahra*. At noon later that same day, the 59ª *Squadriglia Sparviero* of Tenente Ignazio Guiso, who was flying a reconnaissance mission for 33° *Gruppo*, bombed warships in Crete's Suda Bay, the aeroplane's five bombs falling close to the carrier *Eagle*.

Capitano Loris Bulgarelli, CO of 60ª *Squadriglia* (33° *Gruppo*), was killed by bursts of fire from a Gladiator of No 3 Sqn RAAF that also damaged his *Sparviero* on 13 December 1940. He too was a posthumous recipient of the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* (*AM*)

On 9 December British troops led by Generals Archibald Wavell and Richard O'Connor unleashed Operation *Compass*, which drove the Italian 10th Army out of Egypt. From the outset the *Regia Aeronautica* committed all of its available forces to bombing and strafing the advancing Commonwealth troops. That same day, at 1230 hrs over Bir Zigdin el Hamra, Hurricanes of No 274 Sqn shot down two 22ª *Squadriglia* (45° *Gruppo*, 14° *Stormo*) S.79s, whose crews all perished. One of these was flown by Tenente Sergio Sartof, who, though his aircraft was badly hit, managed to drop his bombs and keep formation until the S.79 exploded. The other aircraft lost was flown by Tenente Fortunato Del Dotto. Meanwhile, 6ª *Squadriglia* (44° *Gruppo*) reported an S.79 written off (Tenente Armando Toni and crew safe). Sartof's tenacity earned him a posthumous *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*.

Two days later Plt Off Stanley Godden of No 274 Sqn shot down a 175ª *Squadriglia* machine near Sofafi (Tenente Italo Caraffa and crew were captured). On 13 December five 33° *Gruppo* S.79s that were attacking British tanks were engaged by Gladiators of No 3 Sqn Royal Australian Air Force. Future ace Flt Lt Gordon Steege (or Flt Lt 'Chaz' Gaden) damaged a *Sparviero*, killing its pilot, Capitano Loris Bulgarelli (60ª *Squadriglia* CO), who was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare.* Tenente Colonnello Ferri Forte, Bulgarelli's wounded co-pilot, assisted by Sottotenente Pierluigi Meroni, who had also been wounded, took control of the damaged S.79 and nursed it home. Bulgarelli's loss was avenged by the 9° *Gruppo* CR.42 escorts, which shot down five Australian Gladiators, with 'Chaz' Gaden being killed.

On 14 December S.79s from 41° and 15° *Stormi* and 33° *Gruppo* effectively bombed a 4th Armoured Brigade column led by Col H L Birks, which suffered one armoured car and four other vehicles destroyed, plus three soldiers killed and 23 wounded. During actions over that area No 274 Sqn Hurricanes claimed six S.79 kills and three probables, while Battle of France veteran and future ace Flt Lt James 'Smudger' Smith of No 73 Sqn was credited with one trimotor victory. Four 41° *Stormo* S.79s were in fact lost, MM22218 of 232ª *Squadriglia* (59° *Gruppo*, 41° *Stormo*), flown by Tenente Aramis Ammannato, force-landing in flames at Gambut, the pilot and crew being safe. Also downed was S.79 MM22221 of 234ª *Squadriglia* (60° *Gruppo*), with Tenente Dario Caiani and crew being killed apart from co-pilot Sergente Maggiore Pasquale Spampinato, who was captured. Another S.79, MM22092, forced-landed, Capitano Giovanni Scagliarini and crew being safe, but Tenente Sergio Cottarelli and crew in MM22230 were all killed.

That same day three 33° *Gruppo* S.79s were intercepted southwest of Sidi Azeiz by two No 274 Sqn Hurricanes, which shot down the 60ª *Squadriglia Sparviero* co-piloted by Sottotenente Giorgio Moccheggiani. Despite wounds, he helped his injured pilot, Tenente Fulvio Gerardi, to bail out, but by doing so Moccheggiani was unable to abandon the aircraft himself and perished in the crash. His selflessness earned him a posthumous *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*.

On 16 December six 9° *Stormo* S.79s attacking British vehicles in the Sidi Omar area were engaged by Hurricanes of Nos 274 and 73 Sqns, which destroyed three bombers and damaged the others. Seventeen crewmen lost their lives including the *stormo*'s CO, Colonnello Mario Aramu, 29° *Gruppo* CO Tenente Colonnello Guglielmo Grandjacquet and 63ª *Squadriglia* CO Capitano Victor-Hugo Girolami, who was acting as bomb-aimer on board Aramu's aircraft. Some surviving aircrew saw Girolami take the place of the killed dorsal gunner, but shortly after that another lethal burst smashed into the position, killing him too. All three fallen unit leaders were posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*. Also on that dramatic day 21 S.79s of 34° *Stormo* arrived in Libya from Sicily.

The slaughter of the *Sparvieri* continued on 18 December when Flt Lt 'Smudger' Smith of No 73 Sqn shot down a 175ª *Squadriglia* trimotor between Bardia and Gambut, Sottotenente Paolo Compagnone and his crew perishing.

Spanish Civil War veteran Colonnello Mario Aramu, CO of 9° *Stormo*, met his fate on 16 December 1940 when his bomber was shot down by Hurricanes over Sidi Omar. For his distinguished service he was awarded a posthumous *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* (*AM*)

During the ill-fated Sidi Omar sortie of 16 December, 63ª *Squadriglia* CO Capitano Victor-Hugo Girolami flew as bomb-aimer on Colonnello Aramu's S.79. Under attack by Hurricanes, he returned fire with the dorsal gun until a burst killed him. His gallantry also earned him a posthumous *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* (*AM*)

On 7 February 1941 flight engineer Sergente Maggiore Ferruccio Morettin of 15° *Stormo* saved the S.79 that he had been sent to repair in the desert by flying it back to Misurata on just two engines, due to a lack of available pilots. This feat earned the brave specialist a well-deserved *Medaglia d'Argento al Valor Militare* (*via author*)

Sottotenente Luigi Gentile of 19ª *Squadriglia* (28° *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo*) became a living recipient of the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* in recognition of his tireless efforts to save his wounded crew when their S.79 was downed on 25 June 1941 and they spent many hours in a dinghy (*AM*)

At 1310 hrs on 3 January 1941, No 73 Sqn Hurricane pilot Sgt Fred Marshall (who had claimed two S.79s on 16 December) downed three of five 52° *Gruppo*, 215ª *Squadriglia* (34° *Stormo*) *Sparvieri* targeting the monitor HMS *Terror* northeast of Bardia. The aircrew from two of the bombers were killed and the third captured. The two remaining S.79s were so badly damaged that they later crash-landed near Benghazi, although both crews were recovered. Two days later five S.79s of 53° *Gruppo* (34° *Stormo*) were intercepted by Hurricanes from Nos 274 and 73 Sqns while strafing British vehicles in the Bardia area. A 217ª *Squadriglia* Savoia was destroyed (Sottotenente Lino Saladin and crew killed) and two others crash-landed. Two of the S.79s were claimed by ace Flt Lt Peter Wykeham-Barnes of No 274 Sqn.

On the night of 21/22 January engine trouble forced S.79 MM22233 of 54ª *Squadriglia* (47° *Gruppo*, 15° *Stormo*) to land near Agedabia. The damaged trimotor was deemed repairable, so a five-man team led by flight engineer Sergente Maggiore Ferruccio Morettin was tasked with making it airworthy. Working hard, Morettin and his squad accomplished their task by 7 February, but as the repatriation of 15° *Stormo* was imminent there was a lack of pilots to fly the aircraft back. Accordingly, to avoid its destruction, and although he was not a pilot, Morettin, supported by cadet airman Ezio Zucco, managed to fly the trimotor back to Misurata in a 32-mile flight with just two engines working. This outstanding feat earned Morettin a *Medaglia d'Argento al Valor Militare*, the *Sparviero* he saved being used for torpedo-bomber training at Gorizia.

On 19 February 41° *Stormo* received orders to fly its 20 *Sparvieri* back to Rome-Ciampino Airport. The following day 13 S.79s duly left Bir el Bhera, but one ditched off Ischia Island and its crew was rescued by a ship. A 235ª *Squadriglia* (60° *Gruppo*) S.79 flown by unit CO Capitano Athos Ammannato also crashed into the sea west of Ischia in Naples Gulf, but no survivors were found. Two others turned back due to poor weather. Command of 235ª *Squadriglia* was passed to Capitano Aramis Ammannato to honour his beloved brother Athos, who received a posthumous *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*.

During April-May the S.79s of 8° *Stormo* reached Libya, first 27° *Gruppo* on the 4th, then 28° *Gruppo*'s 19ª *Squadriglia* on the 30th and, by May, 10ª *Squadriglia*. The only *Sparvieri*-equipped units that remained in Libya by the summer of 1941 were 8° *Stormo* and 174ª and 175ª *Squadriglie* RST.

On the morning of 25 June a 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Sottotenente Luigi Gentile, searching for a downed torpedo-bomber, was shot down near Sidi Barrani. Gentile ditched successfully, then got his crewmen, all of whom were wounded, into a dinghy. Observer Infantry Tenente Sante Patussi, although badly wounded, encouraged all of his crewmates until he passed away after they had been adrift at sea for 17 hours. Gentile eventually paddled to the shore and sought help until the survivors were rescued. Both Gentile and Patussi, having displayed outstanding moral qualities, were decorated with the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*. However, 8° *Stormo*'s ordeal was not yet over, for on 11 July another trimotor was destroyed by a No 39 Sqn Martin Maryland flown by Sgt Berriman.

At 0310 hrs on 12 September 10ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM22093, being flown on a reconnaissance mission by Tenente Cesare Piccaretta, was shot down and its crew killed by Blenheim IVF R3919 flown by Flg Off Lydall of No 113 Sqn. The Blenheim was slightly damaged by the S.79's return fire. Two days later a No 112 'Shark' Sqn Tomahawk flown by future ace Plt Off Neville Bowker destroyed 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79 MM21751 over Sidi Rezegh, Capitano Sergio Fonsili and his crew being listed as missing.

Incredibly, the first day of November saw a 174ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Capitano Ferruccio Ronzi operating in the fighter role. At 1612 hrs the *Sparviero* pilot counterattacked three No 18 Sqn Blenheims, and a similar number from No 107 Sqn, that were targeting the freighter *Capo Arma* and its escort torpedo-boat *Procione*. Two of No 107 Sqn's Blenheims were damaged by the trimotor's wild bursts, which substantially contributed to the convoy's safety.

Five days later, over airfield LG 110, six Tomahawks of No 2 Sqn South African Air Force (SAAF) shared in the destruction of a 19ª *Squadriglia* reconnaissance S.79, which was finished off by Lt D S Rogan. Tenente Celestino Tonnelleri and crew were posted missing. On 23 November, during the Allied offensive Operation *Crusader*, four No 272 Sqn Beaufighters destroyed four of five 174ª *Squadriglia* S.79s at Barce, the Italian aircraft having not been dispersed. Anti-aircraft fire struck one Beaufighter, which forced-landed in the desert. Another S.79 was destroyed at Agedabia by a Special Air Service (SAS) patrol during the night of 21/22 December.

By the end of 1941, after 8° *Stormo*'s repatriation, just a few S.79-equipped units remained in North Africa – 174ª and 175ª *Squadriglie* RST at En Nofilia, 279ª and 284ª *Squadriglie* AS at Misurata and 103ª *Squadriglia Sahariana* (Sahara Squadron) at the Hon Oasis. During late 1941 and into January 1942, the average serviceability of North African-based S.79s dwindled to around 25–28 aircraft in total. Due to their paucity in numbers and increasing obsolescence, few of the *Sparvieri* saw action from this point on.

During September 1942 S.79s from Libyan-based air units were detached for ground-attack duties, searching for SAS and Long-Range Desert Group intruders. From 16 to 22 September *Sparvieri* intervention thwarted attempts by a British motorised column to seize the Jalo Oasis. On 1 December 1942, 102ª *Squadriglia Sahariana* was formed, equipped with former torpedo-bomber S.79s. This unit, along with 103ª *Squadriglia*, was tasked with supporting Axis units retreating after the Battle of El Alamein. The two *Squadriglie Sahariane* fulfilled their task honourably until they were disbanded in mid-January 1943 after their 11 S.79s had been repatriated (thus bringing to an end the aircraft's participation in the North African campaign), the long Axis retreat to Tunisia being nearly completed. On 23 January the British entered the Libyan capital, Tripoli.

Despite being mortally wounded, Infantry Tenente Sante Patussi, an observer aboard Tenente Gentile's trimotor, encouraged and praised his crewmates during their 17 hours at sea in a dinghy until he passed away. Patussi's positive demeanour earned him a posthumous *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* (*AM*)

A long-range reconnaissance 175ª *Squadriglia* S.79 surrounded by Italian troops, including *Bersaglieri* light infantry and apparently some British prisoners (extreme right of photograph) (*SME*)

CHAPTER SIX

IN EAST AFRICAN SKIES

When Addis Ababa airfield fell to Commonwealth forces on 6 April 1941, S.79 6-6 of 44° *Gruppo*'s 6ª *Squadriglia* was captured in a damaged state. Another S.79 is visible in the background on the left (*IWM*)

When war broke out in East Africa the S.79s of 44° *Gruppo bis* (6ª and 7ª *Squadriglie* at Diredawa) were the most modern Italian aircraft in the theatre. Later, *Sparvieri* would also equip other units, namely 28° *Gruppo bis* (10ª and 19ª *Squadriglie*), 4° *Gruppo bis* (14ª *Squadriglia*) and 25° *Gruppo bis* (at least one trimotor in 9ª *Squadriglia*).

On 13 June 1940 the port of Aden (in Yemen) was bombed by nine 44° *Gruppo* S.79s from Diredawa. Anti-aircraft fire from the cruisers HMAS *Hobart* and HMS *Carlisle* hit S.79 MM21938 of 7ª *Squadriglia* flown by Sottotenente Corrado Ruffini, which was forced to land. The remaining eight S.79s split up into two patrols, one of two and the other of six trimotors, after which they were intercepted by two Gladiators from No 94 Sqn flown by Plt Off Stephenson and Sgt Price. The latter attacked the two-strong S.79 patrol, while Stephenson aimed at the rearmost S.79 in the six-strong formation, nine miles north of Sheik Othman. This aircraft, MM21934 of 6ª *Squadriglia*, flown by Capitano Michelangelo Serafini, had already been damaged by shell splinters and was straggling with its undercarriage lowered. Stephenson chased it as far as Khar Umera, when his Gladiator was badly damaged by return fire from the S.79's dorsal gunner. A 12.7 mm round struck the centre section of the Gladiator's upper wing after riddling the oil radiator, forcing Stephenson to land at Makhnuk. Serafini's S.79 was riddled with 100 holes and he tried to land near the Eritrean port town of Assab, but the undercarriage collapsed and

the bomber overturned, being written off. All six crew were injured but escaped with their lives.

Five days later three S.79s dropped 2400 kg of bombs on Port Sudan, meeting no opposition. At 1615 hrs on 11 July an S.79 of 6ª *Squadriglia* (44° *Gruppo*) from Javello bombed Kenyan Moyale, and on the 16th, at 1345 hrs, a 44° *Gruppo* S.79 targeted 60 lorries in the Buna area. Anti-aircraft fire wounded gunner 1° Aviere Armiere Giuseppe Abruzzese. On 18 July three 44° *Gruppo* S.79s took off from Neghelli to bomb both Wajir and Buna, claiming a British fighter shot down over the former target. One of the trimotors was hit by anti-aircraft fire, however, wounding an airman photographer.

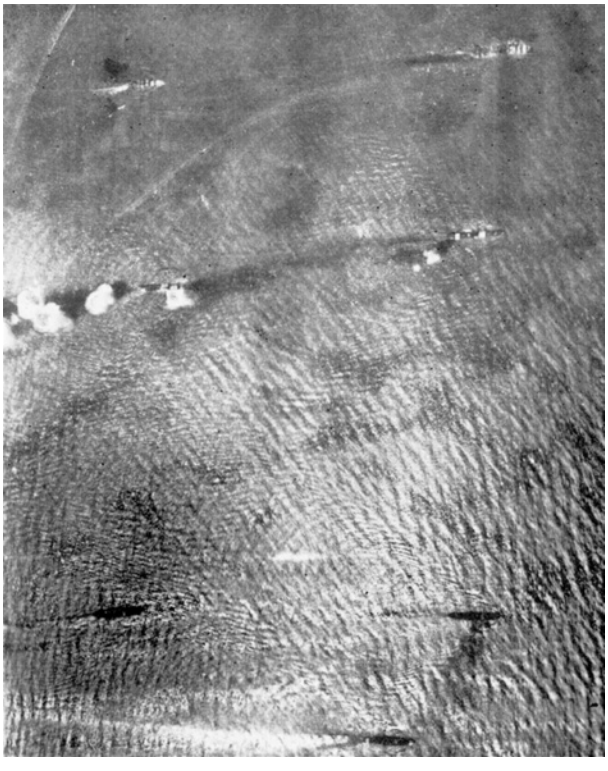
Ten days later three 44° *Gruppo* S.79s took off from Diredawa to bomb the port of Aden, where they damaged the steamer *Mathura*. Aden was raided again on 29 July by five more 44° *Gruppo* S.79s, their crews claiming to have hit two ships and a fuel dump. According to British reports, at 0820 hrs on 2 August two No 112 Sqn Gladiators scrambled from Summit airfield in the Sudan to intercept three S.79s, whose return fire damaged the Gladiator of Flt Lt K H Savage. There is no mention of this action in Italian records, however.

Six days later, at 1400 hrs, the Italian invasion of British Somaliland having been in progress since 3 August, a No 203 Sqn Blenheim flown by Plt Off Corbould jumped three 44° *Grupo* S.79s bombing the port of Berbera and damaged one, mortally wounding a crewmember. Berbera had been attacked by two other 44° *Gruppo* S.79s three hours earlier.

On 11 August another 44° *Gruppo* S.79 targeted British headquarters' buildings at Lafaruk, in Somaliland, the trimotor being hit by anti-aircraft fire. The following day three 44° *Gruppo* S.79s bombed Berbera airfield and were then chased for 15 minutes by a No 203 Sqn Blenheim. The bombers' return fire hit the cockpit of the RAF fighter, wounding both pilot and observer. At 0820 hrs on 14 August two 44° *Gruppo* S.79s attacked an enemy warship off Bulhar in the Red Sea. The following day three 44° *Gruppo* trimotors inconclusively bombed the crossroads at Lafaruk.

At 1330 hrs on 16 August two 44° *Gruppo* S.79s raided the port of Berbera and a trimotor was slightly damaged by shell splinters. Ninety minutes later three more 44° *Gruppo* S.79s attacked Berbera again, although on this occasion they were intercepted by two French Martin 167F Maryland bombers attached to No 8 Sqn and a No 203 Sqn Blenheim. Capitaine Ritoux-Lachaud, flying a Maryland, scored hits on Sottotenente Luigi Conti's S.79 MM21940, which soon afterwards blew up near Sheik, killing its crew. Ritoux-Lachaud was shot down and killed by a 413ª *Squadriglia* CR.42 whilst flying Martin 167F Nº 82 over Moggio (Addis Ababa) on 8 September.

On 18 August two S.79s were hit on the ground when Addis Ababa was targeted by five Vickers Wellesley bombers of No 223 Sqn. Although MM21933 was destroyed and MM22059 badly damaged, four Wellesleys were damaged, one seriously, by anti-aircraft fire and a solitary aggressive 413ª *Squadriglia* CR.42. That same day 44° *Gruppo* S.79s twice targeted Berbera, three trimotors turning back at 0900 hrs owing to poor weather but three others attacking at 1600 hrs, their bombs slightly damaging HMAS *Hobart*. Two escorting CR.32s drove off a Blenheim. At 0900 hrs the following day three 44° *Gruppo* S.79s raided Berbera for the last time, the Italians completing their conquest of Somaliland shortly thereafter.



Ships of convoy BN 5 are bombed by S.79s in the Red Sea on 20 September 1940. On that day *Sparvieri* attacks struck the steamer *Bhima*, which had to be beached (*via author*)

On 2 September a 44° *Gruppo* S.79 reconnoitring Aden at 0830 hrs outdistanced two No 94 Sqn Gladiators trying to intercept it. Two days later three more 44° *Gruppo* S.79s bombed Aden shortly after 1200 hrs. Two No 94 Sqn Gladiators were scrambled and one scored a few hits on a trimotor. The steamer *Velko* was badly damaged by the Italian bombers. On 6 September an S.79 attacked Convoy BS 3 1/2, while three others from 44° *Gruppo*, flying from Addis Ababa, raided Aden. Six Gladiators of No 94 Sqn were scrambled and two intercepted the bombers head-on – one S.79 was hit in its central engine and oil tank. Another bomber struck a tree when landing back at Diredawa and was written off, its crew escaping injury.

On 12 September a 7ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Tenente Tixi reconnoitred Perim at 1225 hrs and was then intercepted by three No 94 Sqn Gladiators and two unidentified monoplanes, all of which it soon outdistanced. The following day Sottotenente Terzi of 6ª *Squadriglia* was reconnoitring over the Gulf of Aden when his S.79 was engaged by a No 94 Sqn Gladiator, although he too soon outdistanced his attacker. Two further actions took placed on 14 and 15 September. The first sortie saw a 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Capitano Serafini briefly intercepted by two No 94 Sqn Gladiators. The following day a 19ª *Squadriglia* (28° *Gruppo*) trimotor flown by Tenente Giovanni Minniti bombed the 10,000-ton Japanese freighter *Nagara Maru*. Also on the 15th, 6ª *Squadriglia*'s Sottotenente La Monica reconnoitred Aden at 1310 hrs and was met by fierce anti-aircraft fire and three No 94 Sqn Gladiators, which forlornly chased the *Sparviero*.

On the night of 14/15 September Blenheim Is of No 45 Sqn raided Gura airfield, damaging two S.79s of 10ª *Squadriglia* (28° *Gruppo bis*). On 17 September a 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Tenente Leonardi bombed the port of Aden at 1500 hrs and then engaged a No 94 Sqn Gladiator in combat. Two days later five 44° *Gruppo* S.79s (three from 6ª and two from 7ª *Squadriglie*) bombed Convoy BN 5 in the Red Sea at 1030 hrs. Two No 94 Sqn Gladiators providing top cover failed to intercept. On 20 September the same convoy was bombed at 1035 hrs by two 44° *Gruppo* S.79s (one each from 6ª and 7ª *Squadriglie*) led by Capitano Serafini, crews claiming a freighter damaged. Two Blenheims escorting the ships failed to catch the bombers. A second attack was flown at 1630 hrs by five 19ª *Squadriglia* (28° *Gruppo*) S.79s, which claimed two freighters hit. The main victim of these attacks was the 5280-ton steamer *Bhima*, which was holed by a near miss and had to be towed to Aden, where it was beached.

On 21 September three 44° *Gruppo* S.79s moved to Javello to raid Archer's Post in Kenya, home to No 1 Sqn SAAF. The Italians dropped five bombs on the airfield's eastern edge and were then chased by four Gladiators from No 1 Sqn SAAF. Four days later at 1220 hrs, a 44° *Gruppo*

S.79 reconnoitred Aden again, claiming a Gladiator downed in flames, but this remains unconfirmed. On 26 September two 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Carlo Caracciolo attacked Port Sudan airport at 1330 hrs and were inconclusively intercepted by six Gladiators.

At 0945 hrs on 30 September a 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Sottotenente Vezio Terzi bombed Aden, after which it was intercepted by two No 94 Sqn Gladiators. Diving steeply, Terzi outdistanced the fighters, claiming a probable Gladiator kill. On 4 October three 44° *Gruppo* S.79s – two from 6ª and one from 7ª *Squadriglie* – led by Tenente Alberto Leonardi unsuccessfully bombed Perim Island at 0835 hrs. The Italian patrol returned to airfield K91 at 1000 hrs, and upon landing aircraft 6-5 ran into the scrub and suffered slight damage.

Five days later four 28° *Gruppo* S.79s, one from 10ª and three from 19ª *Squadriglie*, led by Capitano Carlo Caracciolo bombed Port Sudan airport at 0905 hrs. Six Gladiators were sighted below during the mission. On 10 October three 7ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Mario Bucchi left Javello at 0650 hrs to bomb both Lodwar and Namaraputh forts in Kenya, returning to base at 1030 hrs.

Three days later at 0810 hrs, three No 94 Sqn Gladiators intercepted the lone 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Sottotenente Italo Gherardini that was bombing Aden. Flg Off Gordon Haywood closed to firing distance and damaged the trimotor, fatally injuring two crewmen. After returning to base, Gherardini attended the burial of his fallen men, gunner 1° Aviere Armiere Ferrari and photographer 1° Aviere Fotografo Ugo Baja, leading an honour platoon. This valiant officer was a veteran of Abyssinian colonial air operations, having flown in that sector with 64ª and 110ª *Squadriglie* from January 1937 through to the autumn of 1938.

During the night of 14/15 October two 44° *Gruppo* S.79s were damaged on the ground during two British raids. At 1608 hrs on the 15th three 6ª *Squadriglia* (44° *Gruppo*) S.79s attacked Convoy BS 6 1/4, which was being escorted by fighters from Aden, in the Red Sea. One No 203 Sqn Blenheim fighter, flown by Plt Off Hes Barnitt, fired a long burst at the S.79 of Sottotenente Italo Gherardini, knocking out two of the trimotor's engines. Gherardini, who had set out to avenge the death of his crewmen two days earlier, tried to nurse his mount to French Somaliland, but the aircraft crashed offshore near Ras al Ara. The S.79's end was witnessed by the Australian destroyer HMAS *Parramatta*, sailing about six miles to the east. The gallant Gherardini was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare*.

The next day, 16 October, the Italians evened the score somewhat. At 0700 hrs a 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Tenente Colonnello Luigi Klinger led nine 412ª *Squadriglia* CR.42s on a successful strafe of the British airfield at Gedaref, in the Sudan. The Fiats destroyed eight Wellesleys of No 47 Sqn, two of which were claimed by the S.79, and two Vickers Vincents of No 430 Flight.

In reprisal for the Italian Gedaref raid, on 18 October three Gladiators of No 1 Sqn SAAF, flown by future ace Capt B J L 'Piggy' Boyle and Lts Robin Pare and Andy Duncan, raided Barentu airfield. An S.79, five Caproni Ca.133 bombers and three 412ª *Squadriglia* CR.42s were slightly damaged on the ground. At 1350 hrs the following day, a 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Tenente Alberto Leonardi bombed Convoy BN 7 sailing from Aden to Perim, its four bombs falling close to a freighter. Leonardi then fought with two top-covering Blenheims.

On 15 October 1940 Sottotenente Italo Gherardini of 44° *Gruppo*'s 6ª *Squadriglia* attacked a convoy in the Red Sea to avenge two of his crewmen who had been killed in combat over Aden two days earlier. However, he was shot down and killed by a Blenheim IVF piloted by Plt Off Hes Barnitt of No 203 Sqn. Gherardini, born in Montescudaio, near Pisa, in 1915, was posthumously awarded the *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* (*AM*)

On 20 October a 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Sottotenente Mario Indri attacked Convoy BN 7 at 1100 hrs and was in turn intercepted by Plt Off Barnitt in a No 203 Sqn Blenheim – they engaged in a long combat. At 1020 hrs the following day three 28° *Gruppo* S.79s led by Capitano Carlo Caracciolo bombed the destroyer HMS *Kimberley*, which had been damaged in a night naval action and taken in tow by the Royal New Zealand Navy light cruiser HMNZS *Leander*. After this action the Italian patrol was inconclusively chased by two Blenheim fighters.

On the afternoon of 24 October a 44° *Gruppo* S.79 reconnoitred the port of Aden, spotting five steamers and a cruiser. Five Gladiators of No 94 Sqn engaged the intruder in a short and inconclusive combat. The next day, three 7ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Mario Bucchi bombed vehicles on Garissa airfield at 0815 hrs, one Gladiator being scrambled in vain. On 26 October two S.79s bombed Malindi airfield from 14,750 ft, causing slight damage. The SAAF Hurricanes of No 2 Sqn's 'D' Detachment scrambled too late to intercept the fast intruders. That same day Capitano Michelangelo Serafini in a 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79 was engaged in an inconclusive combat with two Blenheims off Aden during a reconnaissance mission, the pilot jettisoning his four 100 kg bombs into the sea. On the last day of October two 19ª *Squadriglia* (28° *Gruppo*) S.79s from Gondar, flown by Tenente Giovanni Minniti and Sottotenente Mario Giusti, respectively, bombed Roseires airfield and defensive emplacements.

On 2 November a 10ª *Squadriglia* (28° *Gruppo*) reconnaissance S.79 flown by Colonnello Emilio Liberati was attacked at 0930 hrs near Mount Tzeghede, in the Sudan, by five Gladiators, which scored 20 hits. The S.79's gunners claimed one fighter shot down, whose pilot was seen bailing out, and another probable. British records make no mention of this combat. That same day a 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Sottotenente Aldo Rastrelli dropped eight 50 kg bombs on the port of Perim without noteworthy results.

At 0930 hrs on 4 November a No 203 Sqn Blenheim flown by Flt Lt Pike, escorting a convoy in the Red Sea, damaged a 10ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Sottotenente Gori that had just bombed the ships. The crippled trimotor landed at Zula with two airmen dead and two wounded. Two days later a 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Sottotenente Aldo Cuniberti spotted 11 freighters and six warships in Aden harbour at 0800 hrs and dropped four 100 kg bombs on them. Shortly thereafter he tangled with a Blenheim over Ras al Ara.

On 15 November two S.79s, one each from 7ª and 19ª *Squadriglie*, and led by Capitano Enzo Giovannini, raided Port Sudan at 1245 hrs. They were attacked by a Gladiator of No 112 Sqn's 'K' Flight flown by Plt Off Wolsey, but the combat was inconclusive. At 1450 hrs on 21 November two 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Carlo Caracciolo raided Port Sudan. The attackers were opposed by gunfire from the cruiser HMS *Carlisle* and two No 112 Sqn Gladiators from 'K' Flight. The latter, flown by Flg Off Green and Plt Off Smither (in K7948), damaged Caracciolo's trimotor, wounding two airmen on board and injuring one in the other trimotor. Return fire from the *Sparvieri* damaged Green's Gladiator.

At 0715 hrs on 12 December a 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Colonnello Emilio Liberati led five 412ª *Squadriglia* CR.42s in a strafing attack on the Goz Regeb airfield in Sudan. The Italian aircraft destroyed four Hawker Hardys of No 237 Sqn's 'B' Flight, although a CR.42 flown by Capitano Raffi, the

unit's CO, fell to anti-aircraft fire. Ace Tenente Mario Visintini successfully rescued his commander, both pilots flying to safety in the cockpit of Visintini's fighter.

On 16 December at 1250 hrs three 10ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Antonio Masala had just bombed Port Sudan when they were intercepted by three Gladiators of No 112 Sqn's 'K' Flight, flown by Flg Off Chapman and Plt Offs Tofield and McPhee, and a No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricane flown by future ace Capt Ken Driver. The Gladiators scored hits on all three trimotors, and Capt Driver damaged the S.79 flown by Sottotenente Fino, who took shelter in clouds, and shot down the trimotor MM22355 flown by Sottotenente Vincenti. Two of Vincenti's crew bailed out, but three others were killed, having jumped without parachutes from their burning *Sparviero*. Both of the damaged S.79s made it back to Gura, Masala's crew suffering three wounded and one killed and Fino's three injured and two dead. Two more S.79 patrols of three aircraft each attacked Port Sudan at 1330 hrs (a 6ª *Squadriglia* patrol led by Capitano Serafini) and at 1400 hrs (a 19ª *Squadriglia* formation led by Capitano Caracciolo). On both occasions defending fighters failed to intercept.

Although they were also destined to achieve fame as torpedo-bomber aces, both Sottotenente Giuseppe Cimicchi (left) and Tenente Giulio Cesare Graziani (right) flew as S.79 bomber pilots in the war's early stages (*via author*)

The last raid was flown at 1445 hrs by 28° *Gruppo* aircraft led by Tenente Edmondo Carlucci. One trimotor aborted with engine trouble and was replaced by a reserve S.79 flown by Tenente Giulio Cesare Graziani, a future torpedo-bomber ace. Having gotten airborne belatedly, Graziani continued the mission alone. After dropping his bombs, his S.79 was intercepted by a No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricane flown by future ace Maj Laurie Wilmot. The South African pilot badly damaged the trimotor, which subsequently forced-landed with Tenente Graziani slightly injured and two airmen fatally wounded. The next day Graziani and his crew were rescued by a Ca.133, their S.79, which had been temporarily repaired, also being retrieved.

Port Sudan was raided again on 17 December at 1215 hrs by three 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Serafini, these aircraft having followed an aborted raid flown by three trimotors from 19ª *Squadriglia* at 1100 hrs. The latter aeroplanes, led by Capitano Caracciolo, had failed to bomb owing to cloud cover. According to British accounts, three S.79 raiders were opposed at 0915 hrs by two 'K' Flight Gladiators and three No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricanes. Capt Driver reported chasing the bombers for 30 miles in his Hurricane before firing at an S.79 near Suakin, claiming it as damaged with its starboard engine dead. All three *Sparvieri* landed back at Gura, two having been slightly damaged.

Although Tenente Giulio Cesare Graziani, seen here in a post-war photograph, achieved fame as a torpedo-bomber ace, he had previously served as a 28° *Gruppo* S.79 bomber pilot in East Africa. He was wounded in combat over Port Sudan on 16 December 1940 by the No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricane of Maj Laurie Wilmot, Graziani's trimotor being forced down (*AM Museum*)

Ninety minutes later four more S.79s again bombed Port Sudan, and these aircraft were also intercepted by two No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricanes and two 'K' Flight Gladiators. Maj Wilmot fired at one of the bombers, which escaped into cloud – all three trimotors returned to base unscathed. Two days later, a solitary 14ª *Squadriglia* (4° *Gruppo*) S.79 flown by Tenente Luca Matera raided Khormaksar airfield at 0420 hrs, dropping 12 50 kg bombs.

ITALIAN EAST AFRICA INVADED

During the second half of January 1941 British Imperial forces invaded Italian-held territories. This invasion was eventually to end Italian rule in East Africa, but only after fierce fighting.

At 1030 hrs on 20 January three 7ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Capitano Marcello Parmeggiani targeted both North Horr airfield and vehicles travelling along El Dukana road. Six Gladiators were seen to scramble, but they failed to intercept the bombers. Similar raids were also flown that day by 28° *Gruppo*, with a 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79 flown by Tenente Colonnello Klinger bombing British vehicles heading for Wachai at 1150 hrs and two 10ª *Squadriglia* trimotors led by Tenente Dino Roscio attacking targets in the same sector at 1450 hrs.

On 27 January three 28° *Gruppo* S.79s were damaged on the ground at Gura airport after being strafed by six Hurricanes and six Gladiators of No 1 Sqn SAAF. Two days later, at 1400 hrs, S.79s were bounced while landing at Gura by eight Hurricanes and five Gladiators from No 1 Sqn SAAF. Capt Driver set ablaze a landing bomber – two crewmen bailed out. That same day two S.79s of the *Squadriglia Stato Maggiore* (General Staff Flight), led by Capitano Flavio Danieli, bombed vehicle concentrations near Gallabat at 1345 hrs, while a 9ª *Squadriglia* (25° *Gruppo*) trimotor flown by Maggiore Cino De Geronimo bombed more than 20 vehicles near Colbio.

On the last day of January two No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricanes attacked a pair of S.79s over Agordat at 1000 hrs. Capt Driver set one bomber on fire. Four airmen bailed out while the pilot stayed at the controls, Driver then attacking the trimotor again as it flew at treetop height. The bomber eventually crashed after its pilot bailed out. Lt H J P Burger fired at the other S.79 and damaged it.

In Eritrea on 1 February, Hurricanes of No 1 Sqn SAAF thwarted five S.79s, escorted by 412ª *Squadriglia* CR.42s, which were attempting to bomb Indian troops entering Agordat. By then, the Italians could muster only seven serviceable S.79s in East Africa. Three days later two No 203 Sqn Blenheims flown by Sqn Ldr 'Jimmie' Pike and Flt Lt Gethin strafed Makale airport, destroying three S.79s on the ground. The two Blenheims were then attacked and damaged by a pair of 410ª *Squadriglia* CR.32s flown by Sottotenenti Veronese and Folcherio. One Blenheim lost a propeller and subsequently crash-landed at Aden.

On 18 February 15 Wellesley bombers of Nos 47 and 223 Sqns attacked Gura airport, and the escorting No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricanes strafed and set ablaze two S.79s. That same day two No 203 Sqn Blenheims strafed Makale airport again, claiming one S.79 set afire and another damaged. A 410ª *Squadriglia* CR.32 flown by ace Sottotenente Veronese shot down Blenheim T2053 flown by Sqn Ldr Solano, who forced-landed in the Piana del Sale with two dead crewmen. Veronese then chased the other Blenheim, T9173, flown by Sqn Ldr Scott, over the sea. The badly damaged Blenheim crash-landed at Aden. The following day an S.79 was destroyed on the ground at Asmara by No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricanes.

Italian bombers targeted British positions along the Keren Front on 21 February, two S.79s being hit by anti-aircraft fire and forced-landing – one of the trimotors was destroyed. The next day, Battle of France ace Flt Lt John Scoular, flying Gladiator N5828 of 'K' Flight, claimed an S.79 shot down over Massawa. Italian reports do not confirm this alleged kill, however. On 23 February Hurricanes of No 1 Sqn SAAF strafed Makale airfield, setting five S.79s ablaze. Despite this, on the 24th a single S.79 flown by Sottotenente Paolo Belfiore of 14ª *Squadriglia* (4° *Gruppo*) attacked Aden's port at 0950 hrs, dropping six 50 kg bombs on the quay and the ships anchored there.

During 4-7 March 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79s repeatedly bombed and strafed the Gideon Force around Dembeccia and Burye; an S.79 flown by Sottotenente Bosi being hit by ground fire over Dembeccia on 6 March. Three days later an S.79 was hit by machine gun fire as it bombed an 11th African Division column at Gabredarre, fatally wounding army observer Sottotenente Gargani – he later died in Diredawa hospital. On 11 March three No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricanes strafed Keren airfield, Capt Driver and future ace Lt John Hewitson setting an S.79 ablaze on the ground.

Two days later, a pair of *Sparvieri* targeting British vehicles overflew Dagabur airfield and were duly pursued by two Hurricanes from 'B' Flight of No 3 Sqn SAAF. Lt L R Dudley fired inconclusively at an S.79 that escaped into clouds, while future ace Capt Servaas van Breda Theron pursued the trimotors for 90 miles. Theron badly damaged the aircraft flown by Sottotenente Lattarulo, who landed at Diredawa with one airman dead and three others wounded. The crippled *Sparviero* was deemed repairable, however.

Hurricanes of No 3 Sqn SAAF strafed Diredawa twice on 15 March, future ace Capt 'Jack' Frost and Capt Theron destroying one S.79 and damaging two more. However, during the second raid, Italian anti-aircraft fire shot down two Hurricanes, killing Capt Noel Harvey. Capt Frost, who was unharmed, was picked up by Lt Kershaw.

At 0740 hrs on 18 March two 6ª *Squadriglia* S.79s led by Maggiore Nino Pasti bombed Agordat airfield, setting a No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricane alight on the ground. Three days later, when Italian bombers targeted British troops defending Mount Dologorodoc on the Keren Front, two S.79s were damaged by anti-aircraft fire. At 1430 hrs on 22 March two S.79s (one from 6ª *Squadriglia* and another of the *Squadriglia Stato Maggiore* machines) led by Capitano Enrico Martinelli strafed enemy motorised troops attacking the Marda Pass, dropping 672 two-kilogramme fragmentation bombs on them. This action was repeated at 0600 hrs the following morning by another pair of S.79s (one each from 6ª *Squadriglia* and *Squadriglia Stato Maggiore*) led by Colonnello Alberto Tiberio, the *Sparvieri* dropping the same quantity of fragmentation bombs as their predecessors.

On 24 March two No 3 Sqn SAAF Hurricanes flown by Capt Frost and Lt Albertus Venter strafed Diredawa airport but failed to hit two S.79s in a hangar. That same morning two trimotors, one each from 6ª *Squadriglia* and *Squadriglia Stato Maggiore*, led by Tenente Alberto Leonardi, rained 448 two-kilogramme fragmentation bombs on both Imi and Gorrahei airports at 0735 hrs and 0845 hrs, respectively. The Italians reported that they soon outdistanced two pursuing Gladiators. The next day three

On 3 April 1941 a 44° *Gruppo* S.79 flown by Capitano Michelangelo Serafini, visible in the background in this photograph, landed near Diredawa. It carried the Duke of Aosta's envoy to discuss British surrender terms, subsequently refused by the Duke (*SAAF*)

6ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, led by Tenente Bruno Chiozzi, and three 413ª *Squadriglia* CR.42s strafed a motorised column at Babile, near Harrar. Fierce ground fire slightly damaged all of the S.79s and also hit a CR.42 flown by Tenente Meoli, who forced-landed behind Italian lines at Sendafa.

On 28 March two No 237 Sqn Gladiators chased an S.79 that had bombed British vehicles, the *Sparviero* returning to base slightly damaged. Two days later, a pair of 44° *Gruppo* S.79s raided Jijiga airfield without hitting a solitary Gloster Gauntlet parked there. Two Gladiators and two No 3 Sqn SAAF Hurricanes chased the bombers, which outdistanced the former but were caught by the latter, flown by Capt Frost and Lt Howitson. The two trimotors were badly damaged, one forced-landing with two killed and three wounded on board. The other S.79, flown by Capitano Serafini, reached Addis Ababa with one dead and one dying airman on board and 800 holes in its fuselage. By then, 44° *Gruppo* was the only active Italian bomber unit remaining in-theatre, all serviceable aircraft operating under its command.

On 31 March three 44° *Gruppo* S.79s led by Maggiore Nino Pasti dropped fragmentation bombs on British troops positioned near Ad Teclesan, after which they were attacked at 0620 hrs by two No 1 Sqn SAAF Hurricanes northeast of Asmara. The Italian gunners hit Lt van der Merwe's machine, which crashed into a mountainside at Zogher, 20 miles north of Asmara, killing the pilot. Trying to avenge his fallen squadron-mate, Capt Driver made three attacks on the S.79s, all of which returned to base damaged and with three wounded among their crews.

Italy's East African empire was collapsing, and on 2 April an S.79 dropped a message stating that envoys of the Viceroy, Duke Amedeo of Aosta, would land at Diredawa the next day. A 44° *Gruppo* S.79 flown by Capitano Serafini and carrying the Viceroy's envoys duly arrived on the 3rd, and the latter were then escorted to Harar to confer with senior British commanders. That same afternoon Serafini's *Sparviero* returned to Addis Ababa, bringing the Duke the British terms – total surrender, thus assuring the safety of women and children. The Duke found this unacceptable and decided to continue fighting. In order to force the Italians to surrender, RAF and SAAF aircraft attacked Addis Ababa airport on 4 April, Hurricanes of No 3 Sqn SAAF destroying an S.79 on the ground. Two days later No 3 Sqn SAAF strafed Dessie airport, destroying two 44° *Gruppo* S.79s and badly damaging a third. That same day Commonwealth forces entered Addis Ababa.

A captured S.79 is repaired by SAAF mechanics (*Pope*)

On 15 April two No 237 Sqn Gladiators and a Lysander

reconnoitring over Debarek encountered a 44° *Gruppo* S.79 that was fired upon by Plt Off Simmonds in a Gladiator. The trimotor escaped at full speed, however, quickly outdistancing Simmonds. The next day two 44° *Gruppo* S.79s and a pair of CR.42s attacked vehicles in the Termaber area, whilst Hurricanes escorting three Junkers Ju 86s of No 12 Sqn SAAF that were bombing Dessie also strafed this target, destroying two S.79s that had already been hit ten days earlier.

On 29 April three No 237 Sqn Gladiators flown by Flg Offs Spencer, Simmonds and Robinson strafed and destroyed a 44° *Gruppo* S.79 at Cer-Cer airport. Following this attack the last serviceable *Sparviero* took off for Shashamanna, but its demise was merely postponed until the next day. On 30 April Hurricane pilot Capt Frost of No 3 Sqn SAAF, patrolling over Jimma and Agara, intercepted the last Italian-operated S.79 as it was flying low through a valley. Frost made two attacks on the trimotor, whose pilot, Tenente Curcio, gained sufficient altitude to allow his crew to safely bail out before the aircraft crashed. This aerial combat marked the end for *Regia Aeronautica* S.79s in East Africa.

Although effectively shorn of air cover, Italian resistance in Ethiopia continued for some months. On 5 June, owing to the pressure exerted by advancing British troops, the few remaining airworthy Italian aircraft were ordered to fly from Jimma to the last stronghold, Gondar. During this procedure the pilots of a Caproni Ca.148 and two 410ª *Squadriglia* CR.42s spotted an S.79, apparently with British markings. The two fighter pilots, Sottotenente Folcherio and Sergente Maggiore Volpe, duly attacked it, but a shortage of fuel forced them to break off and they landed at Azoza. Thus, the 'British' Savoia-Marchetti escaped, this being the last occasion on which an S.79 was a protagonist in East Africa, albeit in foreign colours.

A gallant soldier and a skilful pilot, Ethiopian Viceroy the Duke Amedeo of Aosta, seen here in a flying suit and being saluted by two officers, personally flew his own transport S.79s, MM21129 and MM21154/I-ABNE (*via author*)

APPENDICES

Appendix A

S.79 WARSHIP KILLS 1940-41

DATE	SHIP	TYPE	LOCATION	S.79 UNIT	RESULTS
17/6/40	HMS *Diamond*	destroyer	off Malta	11° *Stormo*	damaged
30/6/40	HMS *Neptune*	cruiser	south of Crete	34° *Gruppo*	damaged
4/7/40	HMS *Protector*	netlayer	Alexandria	34° *Gruppo*	damaged
8/7/40	HMS *Gloucester*	cruiser	south of Crete	10° *Stormo*	damaged
8/7/40	HMS *Malaya*	battleship	south of Crete	34° and 41° *Gruppi* and 15° *Stormo*	damaged
8/7/40	HMS *Royal Sovereign*	battleship	off Calabria	34° *Gruppo*	damaged
8/7/40	HMS *Eagle*	carrier	off Calabria	34° *Gruppo*	splinter damage
8/7/40	HMS *Warspite*	battleship	off Calabria	34° *Gruppo*	splinter damage
9/7/40	HMS *Resolution*	battleship	west of Sardinia	8° and 32° *Stormi*	minor damage
9/7/40	HMS *Hood*	battleship	west of Sardinia	8° and 32° *Stormi*	minor damage
9/7/40	HMS *Ark Royal*	carrier	west of Sardinia	8° and 32° *Stormi*	minor damage
11/7/40	HMAS *Vampire*	destroyer	east of Malta	36°and 41° *Stormi*	damaged
12/7/40	HMS *Liverpool*	cruiser	east of Malta	15° *Stormo*	damaged
27/7/40	HMAS *Sydney*	cruiser	off Egypt	34° and 41° *Gruppi*	minor damage
29/7/40	HMS *Liverpool*	cruiser	north of Sidi Barrani	34° *Gruppo*	damaged
1/8/40	HMS *Ark Royal*	carrier	south of Balearics	8° and 32° *Stormi*	internal damage
15/8/40	HMS *Moorstone*	mooring vessel	Alexandria	10° *Stormo*	sunk
18/8/40	HMAS *Hobart*	cruiser	Berbera	44° *Gruppo bis*	damaged
4/9/40	ORP *Garland*	destroyer	west of Sardinia	8° and 32° *Stormi*	damaged
4/9/40	HMS *Ilex*	destroyer	off Rhodes	39° *Stormo*	damaged
7/9/40	HMS *Hellespont*	Admiralty tug	Malta	36° *Stormo*	damaged
7/9/40	HMS *Olympus*	submarine	Malta	36° *Stormo*	damaged
29/9/40	HMS *Warspite*	battleship	north of Sidi Barrani	9° *Stormo*	splinter damage
12/10/40	HMS *Eagle*	carrier	off Malta	108° *Gruppo* (36° *Stormo*)	shock damage
27/11/40	HMS *Ark Royal*	carrier	Cape Teulada	28° and 89° *Gruppi*	internal damage
27/11/40	HMS *Firedrake*	destroyer	Cape Teulada	28° and 89° *Gruppi*	damaged
27/11/40	HMS *Defender*	destroyer	Cape Teulada	28° and 89° *Gruppi*	damaged
10/5/41	HMS *Fortune*	destroyer	off Cape Bougaroun	32° *Stormo*	damaged
23/7/41	HMS *Firedrake*	destroyer	west of Sardinia	32° *Stormo*	damaged

APPENDIX B

S.79 MERCHANT SHIP KILLS 1940-41

DATE	SHIP	TYPE/COUNTRY	LOCATION	S.79 UNIT	RESULTS
12/6/40	*Finisterre*	support ship/Fr	Bizerte	32° *Stormo*	sunk
28/7/40	*Mathura*	steamer/UK	Aden	44° *Gruppo bis*	damaged
31/8/40	*Cornwall*	steamer/UK	west of Crete	34° *Gruppo*	damaged
4/9/40	*Velko*	steamer/UK	Red Sea	44° *Gruppo bis*	damaged
7/9/40	unnamed	dockyard picket boat/UK	Malta	36° *Stormo*	sunk
20/9/40	*Bhima*	steamer/UK	Red Sea	44° *Gruppo bis*	damaged
1/11/40	unnamed	fuel barge/Greek	Suda Bay	34° *Gruppo*	sunk
18/11/40	*El Nawras*	steamer/UK	Alexandria	14° *Stormo*	damaged
24/11/40	*Zahra*	steamer/UK	Alexandria	33° *Gruppo*	damaged
27/2/41	*Georgios Krinis*	steamer/Greek	Milos Bay	92° *Gruppo*	damaged

COLOUR PLATES

1

S.79 'Black 1' of Capitano Tullio De Prato, 10ª *Squadriglia*, XXVIII *Gruppo Bombardamento Veloce*, *Aviazione Legionaria*, Son San Juan, Balearics, December 1937

The aircraft flown by Capitano De Prato has the large three-tone band camouflage of *verde*, *marrone* and *giallo mimetico* (camouflage green, brown and yellow) used by Italian S.79s during the late 1930s. The 10ª *Squadriglia* badge is typical of the period, featuring a white egg-laying hen inside a large black fuselage identification roundel. This humorous insignia derived from Capitano De Prato's nickname, *'Gallina'* (hen).

2

S.79 'Red 5' of Sottotenente Francesco Casadio, 19ª *Squadriglia*, XXVIII *Gruppo Bombardamento Veloce*, *Aviazione Legionaria*, Son San Juan, Balearics, 7 December 1937

This aircraft arrived at Palma de Mallorca from Guidonia-Montecelio with five other 19ª *Squadriglia* S.79s at 1430 hrs on 30 November 1937. It features the *squadriglia* emblem, the *zampa alata* (winged paw), which was derived from the nickname, *'Zampi'* (real name Capitano Pietro Zigiotti), of the 19ª *Squadriglia* CO. On 7 December 1937 Sottotenente Casadio's trimotor, along with those of Capitano Zigiotti and Sottotenente Eugenio Geymet, bombed the Col de Balaguer Road with inconclusive results.

3

S.79 28-16 of Sottotenente Giovanni Chiasserini, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo*, 111° *Stormo Bombardamento Veloce 'Sparvieri'*, Zaragoza, Spain, 4 January 1939

Italian aviators, being quite superstitious, did not allow any S.79s of 111° *Stormo* to carry the code 28-17, as 17 is an unlucky number in Italy. 28-16 was also regarded with suspicion, however, as the individual digits of its four-number code also added up to 17, and incredibly this *Sparviero* turned out to be the unit's jinxed aircraft. The first S.79 so coded, 28-25, collided with flak-stricken trimotor 28-3 on 28 March 1938, only three airmen surviving among the two crews involved. Similarly-coded *Sparviero* 28-16 was hit by anti-aircraft fire over Borjas Blancas on 4 January 1939. Mutilated co-pilot Sergente Maggiore Ezio Biondi flew it back to base with pilot Sottotenente Giovanni Chiasserini dead and three wounded crewmen.

4

S.79 28-2 of Maggiore Mario Aramu, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo Bombardamento Veloce*, Soria, Spain, May 1937

On 21 May 1937 Maggiore Aramu led a five-strong S.79 patrol to bomb the Republican battleship *Jaime I* moored in the port of Almeria. Heavily bombed and disabled, the warship was towed to Cartagena, where it sank in June following an internal explosion. Aramu's aircraft was severely damaged by anti-aircraft fire over Bilbao on 24 May 1937, its crew being unharmed.

5

S.79 'Blue 2', 52ª *Squadriglia*, XXVII *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo Bombardamento Veloce 'Falchi delle Baleari'*, Son San Juan, Balearics, March 1938

This aircraft displays the 'bomb-dropping cupid' insignia of 52ª *Squadriglia* inside its aft fuselage black roundel. The name *BONANNO* on the bomb is the nickname of Capitano Michele Banchio, the unit's commander. All of the squadron's aircraft carried light-blue individual numerals, while S.79s of its twin 18ª *Squadriglia* were identified by white (or, according to some sources, grey) numerals.

6

S.79 MM21175 28-3 of Capitano Athos Ammannato, 285ª *Squadriglia*, XXX *Gruppo*, 111° *Stormo Bombardamento Veloce 'Sparvieri'*, Zaragoza, Spain, 19 January 1939

On 19 January 1939 five 285ª *Squadriglia* S.79s bombed the road east of Igualada near Barcelona, one, 28-1, being struck by shell splinters from anti-aircraft fire. On this sortie S.79 28-3 was flown by Capitano Athos Ammannato. This trimotor bears the famous 'Green Mice' emblem mid-fuselage.

7

S.79 MM21165 28-6 of Tenente Giovanni Canepa, 285ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo Autonomo Bombardamento Veloce*, Logroño, Spain, December 1937

Another 'Green Mice'-marked S.79, this aircraft was flown by Tenente Canepa (with future *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* recipient Sottotenente Federico Cozzolino on board) on two missions undertaken by 285ª *Squadriglia* on 5 and 10 December 1937. In the first action three S.79s bombed the Bujaraloz area near Lerida and were then chased by Republican fighters. The second action saw four trimotors target a factory and barracks at Barbastro and then engage in combat with two more Republican fighters.

8

S.79 MM21170 28-9 of Tenente Aldo Buzzanca, 285ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo Autonomo Bombardamento Veloce*, Logroño, Spain, 14 December 1937

Tenente Aldo Buzzanca flew this trimotor on several actions during the winter of 1937/38. On 14 December 1937 28-9 was hit by anti-aircraft fire over Candasnos, returning to base with the bomb aimer's ventral gondola heavily damaged.

9

S.79 MM21380 28-11 of Tenente Colonnello Ranieri Cupini, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo Autonomo Bombardamento Veloce*, Soria, Spain, autumn 1937

Flown by Tenente Roberto Dagasso, this S.79 bombed the Renteria bridge south of Guernica on 26 April 1937, along with two other trimotors. It was later flown by Tenente Colonnello Cupini on several actions. On 15 July 1938 28-11 was lost when it crashed near Valdelinares, killing the pilot, Tenente Giulio Giovine, and all of his crew bar one airman who took to his parachute.

10

S.79 MM20672 28-12 of Tenente Adolfo Rebez, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo*, 111° *Stormo Bombardamento Veloce 'Sparvieri'*, Zaragoza, Spain, 15 July 1938

Tenente Rebez's S.79 displays the Fascist motto *'fregatene'* ('don't give a damn') inside the black identification roundel on its rear fuselage, plus a big *'M'* (for Mussolini) on its fin. On 15 July 1938 Rebez took off from Zaragoza at 1500 hrs with four other 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s to bomb enemy vehicles along the road south of Barracas.

11

S.79 28-14 of Tenente Paolo Moci, 280ª *Squadriglia*, XXIX *Gruppo Autonomo Bombardamento Veloce*, Logroño, Spain, 23 November 1937

On 23 November 1937 Tenente Moci's trimotor bombed the railway station and a factory at Monzon, Lerida, along with two other 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79s. The trimotors then fought with three Republican fighters between Monzon and Huesca, and over the latter area the central engine of Moci's S.79 proved troublesome. However, all of the bombers returned to base at 1610 hrs. Moci's trimotor features large *giallo mimetico* (camouflage yellow) mottles over *verde mimetico* (camouflage green) background uppersurfaces. Note the little bat marking on its engine nacelle, indicating this trimotor's former service in the Balearics.

12

S.79 204-10 of Colonnello Attilio Biseo, 204ª *Squadriglia*, XLI *Gruppo*, 12° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre* '*Sorci Verdi*', Guidonia-Montecelio, Lazio, spring 1938

Being Colonnello Biseo's mount, this S.79 carries the blue-and-red-striped rectangular rank pennant of a *stormo* commander on the closed waist window. This S.79 lacks nationality roundels above and below its wings. The bomber's camouflage comprises a three-tone large-band scheme of green-brown-yellow uppersurfaces, white spinners and *grigio mimetico* (camouflage grey) undersurfaces. Renowned as an international S.79 record setter, Colonnello Biseo led XLI *Gruppo*'s 204ª and 205ª *Squadriglie* (forming the *ad hoc* XII *Gruppo*) in attacks against targets on the Mediterranean Spanish coast, flying from the Balearic Islands, between late September and late October 1937.

13

S.79 254-1 of Maggiore Galeazzo Ciano, 254ª *Squadriglia*, 105° *Gruppo*, 46° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Pisa-San Giusto, Tuscany, 14 June 1940

This aircraft has its uppersurfaces painted with irregular wavy streaks of green-brown-yellow and displays the *gruppo* CO's swallow-tailed blue-and-red-striped rank pennant on its fuselage. It was Maggiore Ciano's principal mount for three sorties flown in June 1940 over French Corsican targets. In addition, Count Ciano piloted this trimotor on six missions over the Albanian-Greek front in January and February 1941.

14

S.79 205-12 of Maggiore Ettore Muti, 205ª *Squadriglia*, 41° *Gruppo*, 12° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Rhodes, Aegean, July 1940

The large white 'M' (for Mussolini) on this S.79's fin was appropriate, as Maggiore Muti was not only a brave pilot but also a member of the Fascist party hierarchy. As 41° *Gruppo* CO, Muti flew this trimotor from the outbreak of war, during June and July 1940. According to 205ª *Squadriglia*'s war diary, from 1240 hrs on 8 July Muti led a four-strong S.79 patrol to attack a British naval formation southwest of Gavdos Island. This was possibly Force 'C', reportedly made up of the aircraft carrier *Eagle*, two *Barham*-class battleships and ten destroyers. The warships' strong defensive fire damaged three of the S.79s, but all of Muti's formation returned to base at 1540 hrs.

15

S.79 10-7 of Tenente Pietro Galassi, 10ª *Squadriglia*, 28° *Gruppo*, 8° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Villacidro, Sardinia, summer 1940

Tenente Galassi's mount (according to the 10ª *Squadriglia* war diary he flew it in June 1940) has its uppersurfaces and ventral gondola finished in large *verde* and *marrone mimetico* (camouflage green and brown) mottles over a *giallo mimetico* (camouflage yellow/sand) background. Its undersides and tailplane struts were *grigio mimetico* (camouflage grey) and the spinners were white, with green-white-red tips representing the Italian national colours. Noteworthy among its markings is the black unit code, partly trimmed in red, and the white individual numeral partly edged in black, with a small rectangular half-white and half-black dash in between.

16

S.79 MM22171 20-6 of Sottotenente Edmondo Pistani, 20ª *Squadriglia*, 46° *Gruppo*, 15° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Maraua, Libya, 13 July 1940

At 1622 hrs on 13 July 1940 three S.79s of 15° *Stormo*'s 46° *Gruppo*, led by Tenente Recagno, unsuccessfully attacked the carrier *Eagle* and were then intercepted by two Blenheim fighters of No 30 Sqn. The trimotors' return fire shot down Blenheim K7181/VT-X, its two aircrew perishing. The latter's destruction was credited to 1° Aviere Marconista Dino Ornani, a wireless operator acting as a gunner on board Sottotenente Pistani's S.79.

17

S.79 MM22208 194-2 of Tenente Mario Cesari, 194ª *Squadriglia*, 90° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Sciacca, Sicily, 9 July 1940

A prominent 194ª *Squadriglia* pilot, Tenente Mario Cesari flew this aircraft, usually as first starboard wingman, on six attack sorties. He bombed El Alouina airport in Tunisia on 13 June 1940 and Bizerte eight days later. On 30 June and 6 July, 194-2 attacked Maltese targets, and it took part in the Punta Stilo battle on 9 July. On 10 and 11 July Cesari dropped bombs on British shipping in Malta and in the eastern Mediterranean. For all of these actions Cesari was awarded a *Medaglia d'Argento al Valor Militare*.

18

S.79 MM22211 194-1 of Tenente Colonnello Gennaro Lamanna, 194ª *Squadriglia*, 90° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Sciacca, Sicily, 21 June 1940

On 21 June 1940 Tenente Colonnello Lamanna, 90° *Gruppo* CO and a Spanish Civil War veteran, led a five-strong 194ª *Squadriglia* S.79 formation to bomb Bizerte naval base. The crews involved claimed a cruiser and three seaplanes stricken in Lac de Bizerte. Because this trimotor was Lamanna's mount it displays the swallow-tailed *gruppo* CO rank pennant.

19

S.79 (serial unknown) 6-6 of 6ª *Squadriglia*, 44° *Gruppo bis Bombardamento Terrestre*, Addis Ababa, Abyssinia, April 1941

The S.79s of 44° *Gruppo bis* were very active over East Africa, the Red Sea and the Yemen from the first days of the war. This trimotor has *giallo mimetico* uppersurfaces with *verde mimetico* mottling and aluminium undersides. Identification black 'Xs' are painted on the white fuselage band and under the wings inboard of the roundels.

20

S.79 MM22313 56-9 of Tenente Arturo Lauchard, 56ª *Squadriglia*, 30° *Gruppo*, 10° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Benina, Libya, 17 August 1940

This was one of three S.79s from 56ª *Squadriglia* that fell to Flg Off John Lapsley of No 80 Sqn on 17 August 1940. After MM22313 crashed in the desert the British retrieved the wreckage and exhibited it as a war prize in Alexandria.

21

S.79 MM21826 192-2 of Capitano Emilio Verrascina, 192ª *Squadriglia*, 87° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Sciacca, Sicily, August 1940

Capitano Verrascina flew four sorties in this S.79 in July 1940 and two more in August. During a hard-fought mission over Malta on 10 July 192-2's gunner Giuseppe Gorini wildly exchanged fire with attacking Hurricanes. His determination earned him a *Croce di Guerra al Valor Militare* (War Cross for Military Valour), bestowed in the field on 28 October 1940.

22

S.79 MM22141 67-2 of Tenente Lelio Silva, 67ª *Squadriglia*, 34° *Gruppo*, 11° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Comiso, Sicily, 11 June 1940

Tenente Lelio Silva flew this aircraft on the second 67ª *Squadriglia* sortie over Malta just 24 hours after Italy had entered World War 2, 67-2 being one of five S.79s led into action by Maggiore Vittorio Cannaviello. According to the unit's war diary, the formation took off at 1740 hrs and effectively bombed Burmola military arsenal. All of the trimotors landed back at Comiso at 1940 hrs. Silva's S.79 still carries the Italian tricolour on its rudder, this marking being painted out just days after the mission.

23

S.79 MM21412 68-7 of Sottotenente Mario Massera, 68ª *Squadriglia*, 34° *Gruppo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Rhodes, Aegean, 30 June 1940

Between 1500 hrs and 1815 hrs on 30 June 1940, in company with three other 68ª *Squadriglia* S.79s, Sottotenente Massera attacked three warships 16 miles south of Gavdos Island, Crete, in 68-7. During this hard-fought action the cruiser *Neptune* had its scout aircraft damaged by near misses.

24

S.79 253-6 of Sottotenente Mario Ingrellini, 253ª *Squadriglia*, 104° *Gruppo*, 46° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Tirana, Albania, 19 November 1940

Sottotenente Ingrellini, a future posthumous torpedo-bomber *Medaglia d'Oro al Valor Militare* recipient, flew this trimotor in company with other 253ª *Squadriglia* S.79s to bomb the Bozigrad area on 19 November 1940. The Italian bombers encountered well-aimed Greek anti-aircraft fire, with one *Sparviero* being hit by shell splinters. Return fire from one S.79 section drove away enemy fighters.

25

S.79 193-6 of Tenente Colonnello Mario Giuliano, 193ª *Squadriglia*, 87° *Gruppo*, 30° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre*, Sciacca, Sicily, 27 December 1940

This *Sparviero* displays both the 'electric man' *squadriglia* badge and the white identification fuselage band adopted by the *Regia Aeronautica* from December 1940. Small white horizontal patches along the fuselage record bloody actions fought on 10 and 11 July 1940, when the aircraft was holed by enemy fighters. Beneath the unit numerals is the motto *'CHI MI TOCCÒ CI LASCIÒ LE PENNE'* ('who touched me lost feathers'). On 27 December 1940 Tenente Colonnello Giuliano flew this trimotor in an unsuccessful search for British warships.

26

S.79 (serial unkown) 58-5 of 58ª *Squadriglia*, 32° *Gruppo*, 10° *Stormo Bombardamento Terrestre,* Palermo, Sicily, spring 1942

This Sicily-based *Sparviero* has the 'continental' *verde oliva scuro* (dark olive green) overall uppersurfaces and *grigio azzurro chiaro* undersurfaces worn by European-based Italian aircraft through 1941/42. It also displays the distinctive large white fuselage band and, on both sides of the fuselage, the 'black cat with bomb' insignia inside a blue triangle bearing the motto '*se ti vedo ti frego*' ('if I spot you I will cheat you').

27

S.79 (serial unkown) 28-62 of 2ª *Escuadrilla*, *Grupo* 5-G-28, *Regimiento* 12 *de Bombardeo*, Son San Juan, Balearics, 8 November 1940

This doomed Spanish aircraft met a dramatic fate on 8 November 1940 when its pilot persistently shadowed the warships of Force 'H'. At 1830 hrs it was shot down by an 808 NAS Fulmar fighter flown by future naval ace Lt Rupert Tillard.

28

S.79 No 3728 'White 12' of Major Dusan Sofilj, 7. *Vazduhoplovni Bombarderski Puk*, *Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplovstvo*, Niksic, Yugoslavia, 14 April 1941

On 14 April 1941 this trimotor, carrying King Peter II of Yugoslavia, took off from Niksic in Montenegro and landed at Paramythia in Greece, thereby escaping the Axis invasion. King Peter then left Paramythia for Menidi in the same aircraft, escorted by Blenheims of No 211 Sqn. From Egypt, the young monarch reached Britain, but S.79 'White 12' (7. *Puk* aircraft had white individual numbers) remained in North Africa, its ultimate fate being unknown.

29

S.79 No 3712 'Black 14' of 81. *Samolstalna Vazduhoplovna Bombarderska Grupa*, *Jugoslovensko Kraljevsko Ratno Vazduhoplovstvo*, Mostar, Yugoslavia, April 1941

This was one of three Yugoslav S.79s which, loaded with the contents of their kingdom's treasury, escaped to Egypt on 19 April 1941 and were subsequently taken into RAF service. Re-serialled AX702, No 3712 was allocated to No 117 Sqn on 26 May 1941. Photographic evidence shows that 81. *Grupa* trimotors had black individual numbers.

30

S.79bis L-112 of the *Al-Quwwat al-Jawwiya al-Lubnaniya*, Rayak, Lebanon, spring 1959

One of four *Sparvieri* delivered to the Lebanese Air Force (LAF) in September 1949, trimotor L-112/LR-AMB was ferried to the Lebanon by commander Ruggeri. The LAF flew its *Sparvieri* from Rayak air base in the Bekaa Valley, using them as cargo transports and occasionally to reconnoitre northern Israel.

UNIT BADGES

1
The badge of 10ª *Squadriglia* BV, featuring a white hen laying an egg against a black background. It was derived from the nickname bestowed upon the unit's CO, Capitano Tullio De Prato, who in Spain was familiarly called *'Gallina'* (hen). According to the unit's war diary, the hen badge was applied (with the permission of an initially reluctant Capitano De Prato) on the black fuselage roundels of its S.79s from 17 December 1937.

2
The badge of 19ª *Squadriglia* BV featured a white winged claw (it should be a paw, as it originated from the Italian word *'zampa'*) on a black background. It was derived from the nickname of the unit's CO, Capitano Zigiotti, who was known as *'Zampi'*

3
The badge of 52ª *Squadriglia* BV depicted a cherub about to drop a bomb bearing the nickname of the unit's CO, Capitano Michele *'Bonanno'* Banchio.

4
The motto *'fregatene'* (don't give a damn) was carried by 111° *Stormo* BV aircraft in 1938.

5
Featuring a diving white hawk dropping a bomb, 8° *Stormo* BV's *'Falchi delle Baleari'* badge was usually superimposed on the large black roundels on both sides of the rear fuselage.

6
The famous *'Sorci Verdi'* (Green Mice) unit insignia of 12° *Stormo* BT. The S.79s of this famous unit usually had the three mice painted midway along their fuselages.

7
The badge of 18ª *Squadriglia* BV depicted a diving hawk carrying a bomb.

8
The humorous badge of 105° *Gruppo* BT, jokingly proclaiming *'divieto di caccia'* (hunting forbidden), was applied to the aircrafts' fins. Beneath the black-lettered warning, in red, is article No 428 of the Italian law codes, which refers to the prohibition.

9
The famous 'electric man' featured in the badge of 193ª Squadriglia BT. This variation was applied on a blue roundel, with the motto *ARDISCO COLPISCO E MENINFISCHIO* ('I dare, I strike and I don't care'). A small roundel beside the emblem covers a bullet hole received in combat. Below, a tricolour stripe bearing the inscription 'MALTA 10-7-40' recalls the bloody action the unit fought over Malta on that date.

10
The badge of 217ª *Squadriglia* BT (53° *Gruppo*, 34° *Stormo*) depicts a bomb crushing an umbrella (symbolising Great Britain according to Fascist propaganda) and the motto *OGGI DOMANI SEMPRE* ('today, tomorrow, forever').

11
The insignia of 32° *Stormo* BT featured a black mosquito and fasces, with the unit inscription.

12
The 36° *Stormo* BT insignia featured the twin Garisenda and Asinelli towers, symbols of the city of Bologna city, dropping bombs on floating British paper ships. The inscription *SOC 1000* by the towers is derived from the Bolognese dialect expression *'socc'mel'*.

13
A bomb-armed black cat inside a light blue triangle bearing the motto *'se ti vedo ti frego'* ('if I spot you I will cheat you') was the badge of 58ª *Squadriglia* BT.

14
The motto *'mi fate un baffo!!'* ('you cannot hurt me!!') was displayed on the fins of some 60ª *Squadriglia* BT S.79s.

15
This individual badge, borne on the fin of 280ª *Squadriglia* S.79 28-16, featured a boy thumbing his nose at possible enemy pursuers. Ironically, it was anti-aircraft fire, not fighters, which proved fatal to this particular *Sparviero.*

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Dedication
To my little big nephew Paolo, to Generale Giulio Cesare Graziani, torpedo-bomber ace and former S.79 bomber pilot, and to Dr Giuliana Balbo, Marshal Balbo's daughter, who as a paediatrician took care of me when I was a child.

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Front Cover
On 17 August 1940, between 0950 hrs and 1025 hrs, 25 S.79s from 10°, 15° and 33° *Stormi* attacked the Mediterranean Fleet battleships HMS *Warspite,* HMS *Malaya* and HMS *Ramillies*, the heavy cruiser HMS *Kent* and 12 destroyers that had shelled Italian troop positions near Bardia and Fort Capuzzo, in Libya, from 0645 hrs. Five S.79s from 33° *Stormo* were driven off by three Sea Gladiators from HMS *Eagle* and six Gladiator I/IIs from 'A' Flight of No 112 Sqn, flying from the landing ground at Matruh West, on the Egyptian coast.

The remaining S.79s (ten trimotors from 10° and ten from 15° *Stormi*) were engaged by Gladiators, and lone Hurricane I P2544 (flown by future ace Flg Off John Lapsley), of 'A' Flight of No 80 Sqn. Three S.79s from 10° *Stormo* were downed and two damaged, one of which subsequently crashed. Six aircraft from 15° *Stormo* also returned to base with varying degrees of damage. In return, No 112 Sqn's Plt Off R A Acworth was wounded by defensive fire from one of the S.79s.

Three of the *Sparvieri* that were destroyed fell to Flg Off Lapsley in what was the first encounter between a Hurricane and the S.79s. All three of Lapsley's victims were from 56ª *Squadriglia* (squadron), namely MM22313 56-9 (Tenente Arturo Lauchard and crew, who became PoWs), MM21351 56-7 (Sottotenente Camillo Mussi and crew, all killed) and 56-2 (Sottotenente Venosta). Venosta's badly damaged S.79 crash-landed near Tobruk with one wounded on board. In this specially commissioned artwork, Mark Postlethwaite depicts S.79 56-9 of Tenente Lauchard coming under attack from Lapsley in his Hurricane. The British Army subsequently retrieved the wreckage of 56-9 and put it on display as a war trophy in Alexandria's Ismailia Square